USF Tampa Graduate Theses and Dissertations   USF Graduate Theses and Dissertations

6-24-2014

Principal Experiences In A School Consolidation

Claudius Bassey Effiom
University of South Florida, ceffiom@verizon.net

Principal Experiences in a School Consolidation

by

Claudius B. Effiom

A Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education
Department of Leadership, Counseling, Adult, Career and Higher Education
College of Education
University of South Florida

Major Professor: Wiliam R. Black, Ph.D.
Zorka Karanxha, Ed.D.
Vonzell Agosto, Ph.D.
Jeannie Kleinhammer-Tramill, Ph.D.

Date of Approval:
June 24, 2014

Keywords: principal leadership, politics of school leadership

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother Gladys Abiodun Bassey-Effiom. It has been twenty

years since you left us, but your flame shines bright. You set such a high bar for all who knew

you. All your actions and decisions demonstrated your strict adherence to the golden rule. Your

life was a testament to love and serenity and I continue to be thankful for the selfless manner you

approached life; even to the extent of enthusiastically encouraging me; your only son, to travel to

the United States to better myself.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my dissertation chair, Dr. Bill Black and members of my committee for their guidance and support throughout the dissertation process. It has taken numerous twists and turns, but your professional support is a testament to the qualities all scholars dedicate their lives to upholding.

Table of Contents

List of Figures

Abstract

Educational leaders must operate in a complex political world that places a premium on skills and strategies involving consensus building, negotiations, and reciprocity. This dissertation is about the leadership struggles and tensions inherent in a school consolidation process. The principals highlighted in this study represent the leader of a metropolitan school which is closed and consolidated with another school in the same school district. The school district employs a defined and planned process to address many issues inherent in a school consolidation like guaranteed placement of displaced teachers in schools of their choice.

I examined the experiences of three principals during the course of the school consolidation to determine if there are any advantages in using a pre-planned consolidation to ensure the success of the consolidation process. My experiences as a principal involved in a school consolidation experience without a defined and pre-negotiated consolidation protocols was used to draw contrasts when interview data was analyzed from the three school principals. To guide my data collection and analysis I used a conceptual framework based on the work of Mead (1934), Husserl (1965), Blumer (1969), Stryker (2002) and Merleau-Ponty (2004), Interpretivism with a case study paradigm based on the work of Hancock and Algozzine (2006), Creswell (2003), Yin (2003) and Miles and Huberman (1994) to guide my study which was aimed at understanding the experiences of school principals during a school consolidation. The initial findings of my study indicated that the experiences for most stakeholders impacted by a consolidation were consistent with those found in the literature concerning other consolidation experiences. There was some minimal reduction in the perceived levels of uncertainty and

anxiety of staff members concerning their employment status. The principals had certain assignments related to the logistical planning and management of resource security and allocation removed from their agenda, but leadership experiences remained fraught with uncertainty and a sense of trial and error in navigating through the processes required for a successful consolidation experience.

This study provided several insights that may be useful to school principals in managing and seeking appropriate assistance from district level leadership to improve the probability that the level of success in a school consolidation may affect various stakeholder groups impacted by the experience. The findings discuss several implications regarding how school principals and school districts may consider the overall impact of a school consolidation on their students and their stance regarding equity and social justice for all the school's communities. Finally, this study provides several recommendations for policy and educational practice.

Chapter One

Introduction

Some leadership practices such as building trust, effectively communicating, fostering cultural integration, and treating individuals fairly are not entirely unique and some may be seen in different forms in the normal day-to-day operational activities of an organization (Meyer, 2001; Range, 2006; Risberg, 1997; Schreyogg, 2006). The real difference is in the intensity and frequency with which they are displayed or required during consolidations.

Fullan (2001) suggested four ways in which school leadership is challenging for principals in today's schools. First, changes are deeper and more involved than in previous years. Second, there are a number of dilemmas in deciding what to do. Third, one acts differently in different situations or phases of a process; and finally, advice comes in the form of guidelines for action, not steps to be followed. Finally, Hale and Moorman (2003) expanded the list of frustrations to include dealing with declining budgets, changing populations, more extensive accountability mandates, and the ever-expanding list of roles and responsibilities for principals.

In the current climate of restrictive budgets, we need a better understanding of the politics involved in the consolidation process, as this process may become one of the methods used to restrain costs while pursuing school reform. I endeavor to provide insider accounts from three school principals perspective on the challenges experienced during the consolidations at their respective schools.

Statement of Problem

This study will examine the tensions, conflicts, successes and challenges inherent in the consolidation of two schools within the same school district into one school that occurred during the period of June 2008-December 2012. The consolidations studied occur in one school district, my experiences of a school consolidation in another district will be used to highlight some contrasts in discussions at the end of chapter five.

This study is framed around the question; how did each principal whose school was consolidated and closed experience the school consolidation process? The main guiding questions of this study include:

- What were the most prominent conflicts and tensions the participants experienced during the school consolidation process?

- What responsibilities did the principal attend to in the course of implementing the school consolidation process and why?

This study is further distinguished as unique as it involves school consolidations initiated due to current circumstances and with limited or no prior planning or preparation. The three consolidations described take place in a large and diverse metropolitan school district in which two schools were merged into one school on the existing school site of one of the two schools. Finally, the consolidations studied are imposed by district personnel in response to external financial pressures.

This case involves dilemmas for educational leaders who may face the process of school consolidation brought on by decreased funding and demands for accountability. I highlight the challenges and opportunities that involve principal responsibilities, equity concerns, and negotiations amid the demands of multiple constituencies.

This study examines one of the most popular educational reforms in American history—school consolidation. I hope to fill a gap in the literature about school consolidation because much of the literature during the Progressive Era focused on district school consolidation and how it played out in rural areas. After the progressive era, the consolidation of schools in urban or suburban school districts was highlighted as it pertained to cost, efficiency and student achievement. This study will focus on the school principal's experiences in navigating the school consolidation. Specifically, the principal whose school was consolidated and closed will be highlighted.

Purpose of the Study

This study describes and analyzes the experiences and responsibilities of three school principals when their metropolitan, public school was consolidated into another metropolitan, public school. The study uses a case study format to compare the experiences of the principals as they negotiated their respective consolidation experiences. The study will report their interpretations of their actions by using thematic analysis to provide an insider's perspective and understanding of the tensions and conflicts inherent in each school consolidation journey.

We know little about the politics of a school consolidation from an emic account and how this consolidation impacts the constituencies involved. The literature is rich with information about the consolidation of rural school districts due to financial constraints and declining student enrollment. There is some literature concerning the consolidation of two schools within one school district into one school on a newly built school site. Since both merging schools arrive at a neutral site, issues of infringement, ownership and the ghosts of prior school history are insignificant factors in those consolidations.

Given the projected fiscal constraints that are likely to occur in future years, the literature provides limited resources, viewed through various political lenses, to guide a school leader in managing the unique type of consolidation that is examined in this study.

I had originally proposed to have the experiences of the three principals' stand alone as the focus of my dissertation, but as I conducted my research interviews it became clear that due to the nature of the three consolidations within the district there would be many similarities in their experiences. Therefore, the dissertation is designed to compare the experience of participants from this district with some experiences I was privy to in my school's consolidation.

The phenomena I will describe and analyze in the three school consolidation experiences are the individual reflections of the three principals related to the decisions that were important and revealing during the course of their respective school consolidation. These three principals perspectives may provide insights to future leaders who may find themselves immersed in this or a similar type of merger or consolidation

This study is framed around my own reflexive stance towards my role and actions as the Acting Principal of a middle school that was closed in a consolidation; but on whose existing school site a consolidated school led by another school principal would reside in the next school year. This study is further textured by document analysis, field notes, and interviews with three school administrators involved in a similar consolidation process.

Research Questions

The primary question this dissertation seeks to answer is: how did the principal whose school was consolidated and closed experience the school consolidation process? To examine this question in depth a range of questions falling into three main categories will inform this study:

First, questions described as consolidation type questions:

- For example; tell me about school consolidation. What happened? Why did it happen? How long did the consolidation process take?

Second, questions designed to explore the school leader's institutional roles and responsibilities.

- For example; how did you come to know how to navigate the various responsibilities of a leader in the consolidation of two schools?

Finally, questions dealing with the challenges faced by the principal in dealing with community and constituency concerns in the areas of politics of consolidation and navigating tensions, using influence, and staying sane.

- For example; what were the most prominent conflicts and tensions during the school consolidation process?

During the interview process, answers to some broad questions may reveal some commonalties between the reflective stance of the researcher and those of the principals interviewed because they have shared a lived experience with the phenomenon of school consolidation. Some questions that maybe used to frame this dialogue include:

- How did the context of the school consolidation described in this dissertation get to be this way?

- Whose interests are served in seeking this consolidation?

- Who benefits and who does not benefit from the existing relationships in each of the consolidating schools?

Leaders, for the purpose of this study, refer to site based principals with formal authority within the organization, typically referred to as principals. The challenges may include issues affecting employees, such as de-motivation, job and other insecurities, fear, and job

dissatisfaction, among others (Cartwright & Cooper, 1990; Marks, 2006). The questions selected for this study seek to identify what practices are evident, and unique in understanding the complexities of the merger experience.

Significance of the Study

This research offers a perspective for making sense of the leadership struggles during a time of uncertainty and change in a diverse community served by the public school system. It also examines the impact on the school principal's experiences of the school consolidation processes used in the district studied.

This case study is unique because it focuses on the role of the school principal whose school was closed as part of the implementation of the consolidation of his/her school with another metropolitan school. The three schools in the case study are located within one school district. Describing and then contrasting these experiences with my experience, may increase knowledge and improve some consolidation practices like strategic communication with stakeholders prior to initiating the consolidation and developing a deeper understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the principal involved in the school consolidation process at the K-12 level.

This information may be useful to district and school leaders involved in similar consolidations given projected fiscal constraints that are likely to occur in future years. The literature does not contain an emic account of how school principals respond to the school consolidation phenomenon and how their leadership choices impact the school communities involved. This study hopes to begin to fill this gap in the literature.

The literature on educational leadership and school change is focused on the role of the school leader in managing educational reform to increase student achievement (Duncombe &

Yinger, 2007). The literature on school consolidation and leadership is very limited; relatively little is known about how consolidation has affected the principals who have experienced it. "The existing school consolidation literature has primarily focused on debates over financial and community effects. To the extent that the literature examines what happens within schools, it has focused on a debate over optimal school size" (Nitta, Holly & Wrobel, 2010). While the work of researchers in leadership studies and the public school system inform this dissertation, the literature provides few resources to guide a school leader in managing the consolidation of one school with a second school within the same school district.

This study is informed by the history of the consolidation movement in the nation's public schools, including its potential merits for the educational system and its social consequences. While the early struggles focused on the efficacy of consolidation revolving around the values of quality and efficiency, now the debate has shifted to issues of choice and equity. McDermott (1999) studied how consolidation had often reflected a very political process in which local interests were pitted against equity arguments framed within state and federal policies.

Today, these policies have developed over time due to the civil rights movement, federal legislation and court rulings that tacitly endorsed the use of consolidation as part of school integration and the pursuit of more equitable educational opportunities. In the contemporary environment, Miller-Kahn and Smith (2001) described a school district in Colorado; in which interest groups took advantage of choice policy frameworks to mold a system that met individual interests rather than the common good of the entire community.

My study is also informed by the historical analysis of schools within local political arenas, such as Robert R. Alford's research on the importance of community identity and school

district consolidation in one California town; Jeffrey Mirel's study of the politics of the Detroit public school system and John L. Rury's look at race, space, and politics in Chicago's public schools.

Conceptual Framework

My study will describe and analyze the lived experiences of three school principals and the meaning they made of the phenomenon of school consolidation. It will be informed epistemologically as an interpretive study. An interpretive research approach was selected because it is important to describe and analyze how principal's fulfilling a prescribed role understand and make meaning of their experiences, in order to develop a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of school consolidation.

Conceptually, I will frame my study on the experiences of school principals in a consolidation by examining the broad areas of micro-politics and educational values and micro-politics and the role of the school principal. These two legs will allow me to develop some themes to make meaning of this dissertation.

Under the macro-political frame I will examine the four values of efficiency, quality, school choice and equity. Under the micro-political framework I will examine the principal's role in dealing with change and uncertainty, the effects of culture, climate and trust and the effects of communication the ability of the school principal in effectively managing a school consolidation. A graphically representation of this conceptual framework is shown in Figure 1.

Rationale of the Study

An analysis of the documents collected should allow me to frame a better understanding of the institutional roles and responsibilities of the school leader, the impact of district policy on the consolidation experience and identify some important themes involved in the politics of

school consolidation. The analysis would provide a nuanced view for understanding what transpired during the consolidation process; inform the literature on this unique type of school consolidation and may prove useful to future district administrators and other school leaders navigating a school consolidation process.

Conceptual Framework
School Consolidation and Principals

Macro-politics/Values

Efficiency
Quality
Choice
Equity

Micro-politics/Principals

Dealing with Change/Uncertainty
Culture/Climate/Trust
Communication

Themes
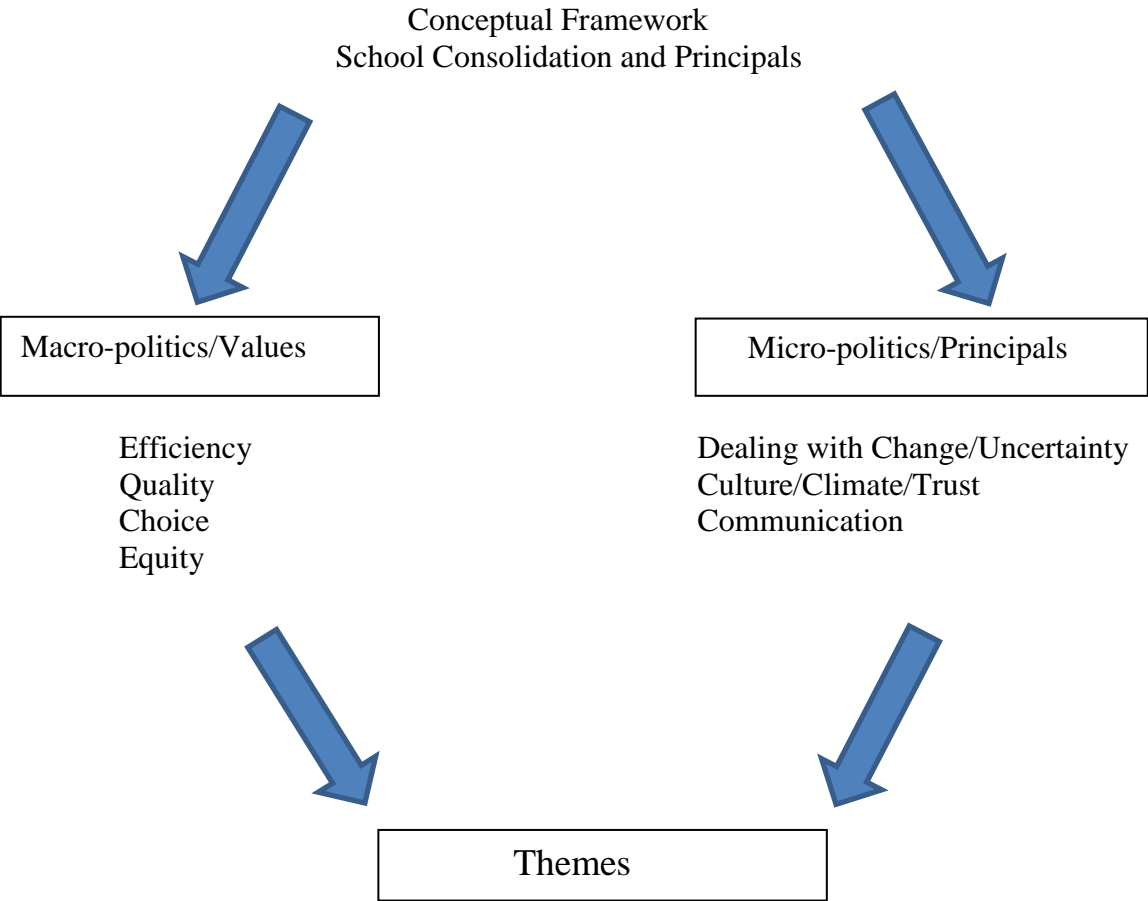
Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

Research Design

In this study, I will be using a descriptive case study approach because it has systematic steps for data analysis and sets guidelines for examining and categorizing critical events that best describe the phenomenon of school consolidation. Interviews will be the main form of data collected, and a modified form of the constant comparative method is used in an electronic format to identify and sort categories into themes.

Reflexivity will be used to make my experience transparent but from having undue influence on the analysis of the phenomenon. Great pains have been taken to fill in "blind spots" of the story that an insider reflexively assumes, although some may still exist.

This study is limited because it is a story told from the perspective of just the school principals who have had a very limited role in shaping the consolidation process. Some available historical data such as newspaper articles, government documents, and transcripts of discussions are used, but some may remain unexamined.

This is What I Did

By the midpoint of the first interview with my first principal, I realized that the context of my dissertation may have to change. The principal informed me that his district had a defined process to execute school consolidations that was a part of the teachers' union agreement that had been ratified several years ago. Therefore, some of the uncertainty, interpretation, and explanation of district and personnel policies that may challenge school-based leaders had been codified in district level agreements and precedent. Since I had committed to conduct all three interviews with the principals in this district I felt there would be some similarities in the three principals' experiences as it related to staff impacted by the consolidation.

Given the challenges I had faced in securing appropriate interview subjects and being in the presence of willing, qualified participants; I chose to conduct all three interviews with fidelity and allow the data to speak for itself and guide me in my future analysis.

What it Means to My Interpretation

The knowledge that the district I was conducting the three principal interviews used a defined process to execute school consolidations that was codified in the teachers and support staff union agreements meant that some of the consolidation experiences that the school principal would have been forced to navigate as events played out would not be present or would be minimized in this district setting.

At a dissertation meeting with my committee members in September 2013, I described the challenges I had experienced post proposal, and the initial outcomes of the three principal interviews I had completed. The committee recommended I proceed with the study, but make modifications to the case study format. I have chosen to complete my study as one case examining the three principals and using my insider experiences to draw some contrasts between the consolidation experiences. A comparison between the principal's experiences from each of the two different districts would become an important focus in my study when data is analyzed and reported.

As a result of the data collected; my main focus in this study will be to describe the experiences of the three principals during their consolidations. In writing the findings and conclusions of this study, I will use my experiences as the researcher to draw some contrasts between the three principal's consolidations and my school consolidation experience.

Role of the Researcher

I was the administrator of a school involved in a school consolidation and I navigated a unique set of experiences spanning a one year period of time from August of 2008 to July 2009. I thus possess an emic perspective of the events described in parts of this case study.

The District Story

The school consolidation process I experienced occurred in a school district considered the 4th largest in the state and one of the fifty largest in the nation. The two middle schools, while part of one school district had different educational philosophies and cultures. This is most graphically demonstrated by the dynamics of low parent participation and student achievement in one school in contrast with the opposite effect in the other school.

Sylvester Middle School is one of over a hundred schools in the School District. The neighborhood in which the school was located was comprised of lower to middle income families that are culturally diverse. In 2000, the City had a population in excess of 100,000. Demographically, 83.85% were White, 9.8% African American, and 8.97% Hispanic or Latino. Of the Hispanic/Latino population, 69 percent were of Mexican ancestry and comprised 48 percent of the total increase in the City's population growth of 10,000 in the prior 10 years. In district schools, growth in the Hispanic population translated into an increase of 843 percent in Hispanic students in ten years.

Reports in the local papers and district sponsored surveys had indicated that the primary determinant for parents in school selection was proximity to their home; but in the midst of this steady growth in overall City population and the Hispanic population explosion; the overall district trend was declining student enrollment and budget constraints resulting in too many student seats in the wrong parts of the city.

My Consolidation Experience.

Two distinct activities are required of the researcher in this study; experiencing the social setting and producing a written record of what is observed. I was an employee of the school district that experienced this consolidation. Therefore, the level of participant –observation is quite high because immersion in the social setting of the study has been readily accessible and familiar to me. Research shows that members of an organization experience the greatest effects of major change in the organization (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1992).

Claud's Story. On Tuesday September 2, 2008 I was appointed to become the Acting Principal of Sylvester Middle School and thus would begin a chain of events that thrust me into one of several cauldrons of intense activity designed to reshape the educational structure of part of the local public school system. My return to Sylvester Middle school as the Acting Principal - a position I was to hold for the remained of the 2008/2009 school year, and the period of time around which this study is framed - a year after I had been transferred out of the school to a new assignment was met with approval by most of the faculty and staff at the school. Sylvester Middle had been an under selected school throughout the choice school assignment period. The reasons given were varied, and included the age of the facilities, the socio economic background of the student population and a perception that there was a lack of safety in the school. Parents of gifted students, a vocal and active community had some concerns about placing their students at the school.

October, 2008: Settling In. One afternoon, soon after I returned to the school, I received a call from a district administrator notifying me that discussions being held at the administration building foresaw placing a Gifted Center at the school as an attractor. The

rationale was to help increase the student population which stood at about of 600 when I took over as the acting principal in September.

November, 2008: The Merger Notification. On Monday November 17, 2008 at about 2:30 PM the phone rang in my office, an Assistant Superintendent from the school district office called to notify me that the next morning, at the scheduled school board workshop, a proposal to "merge" Sylvester Middle school with a back-to-basics middle school located two miles to the east would be one of the major items on the agenda. I listened intently, thanked the caller, returned the phone to its cradle, took a deep breath, and leaned back in my seat pondering the ramifications of this proposal on my school community.

I was told not to share this information with any one at this time. I did not. I went home that evening to a quite house. I needed this quiet time to digest the news I had received earlier that day. What did the district official mean by the word "merge"? As an aspiring doctoral student with eight years' experience in the financial services industry, a degree in Accounting, and 17 years in education, I knew it did not mean the same thing in the educational realm as it did in the business world, but I remained uncertain. I spent the evening researching the literature on school mergers.

The next morning started as normally as most Tuesdays I had experienced as the Principal over the last three months. The school day was quiet, but I kept expecting a call clarifying the message I had received the previous day. There was no phone call.

After supervising the student lunch periods, I decided to go on the various websites that I knew reported local educational news. I was able to obtain reports of the Board agenda and knew that the merger recommendation was under discussion. As stated in the Board meeting, the main reason for the proposed consolidation was related to cost savings and increased efficiency in the

allocation and use of resources. Coincidentally, there were no budgetary projections given for the expected savings. It was simply discussed with the presumption that the existence of one less school to maintain and staff would automatically yield cost savings.

My Initial Insights on School Consolidations

Recent studies have questioned the academic and social merits of large consolidated high schools. Gregory C. Malhoit and Derek W. Black have explained that the promises of school consolidation to provide an equal education and significant cost savings have not come to pass because of increases in discipline, dropouts, and absenteeism. According to Mahloit and Black, cost savings associated with larger schools are offset by higher administrative costs and other expenses related to student discipline. Moreover, Mahloit and Black assert that smaller schools are more in touch with student needs and help to create a democratic community (Malhoit & Black, 2003).

In another study completed in 2005, the National Rural Education Association (NREA) argued that there is no solid evidence for the belief that closing and eliminating small schools and school districts improve education, enhance cost-effectiveness, or promote equality (NREA Task Force, 2005).

November, 2008: The Merger Announcement to Staff. By 4:00PM I knew I had to do something, I could not allow the staff to leave the building at the end of the school day without telling them of the issues being discussed at the Board meeting. I called an emergency faculty meeting at 4:20pm to tell them of the proposed recommendation. As the staff assembled in the Media Center, I knew instinctively that I had made the right decision. I noticed a staff member at a computer calling a friend to read the screen along with him. I sensed that those two individuals already knew. Needless to say, all were stunned by the news and proceeded to cluster in small

groups to talk. I remained at the lectern and surveyed the view that surrounded me in that media center.

Over the next hour, groups of teachers and other staff slowly left, thanking me for trusting them enough to share this difficult information. They sensed that I had not been authorized by my superiors to talk to them at this time. I went home late that evening and quietly shared the day's events with my wife. Things remained quiet in the building for the next two days. Most staff was still trying to make sense of the news and analyze the implications of this development on their personal lives. There was little conversation. As the days passed, I trolled the internet searching for insights on how mergers and consolidations had affected other schools over the years. I found little of relevance to the situation my school was faced with. A sense of resignation set in. I often thought of the words of George Cawood, a consultant with the Kentucky School Boards Association:

> School leaders take few actions that can evoke the levels of passion
> like closing a school. That's one of the toughest things because every
> community considers that school to be the center of the community,
> and if you remove the school, you're removing the heart of the
> community. The only way to counteract that reaction is to do a lot
> of research and use the data to show how it will benefit students from
> curriculum offerings, nicer facilities or savings in terms of maintenance.
> But sometimes, you can get all that data out there and it still won't
> change the attitudes in the community (Hughes, 2003, p. 16-18)

Reflection

Seventeen years of experience in the school system, during which I had regularly been involved in piloting many innovative reform ideas had shown me that change was very difficult for many staff members. Not only was it difficult, I saw that it was generally accompanied by fear. Fear of change, fear of losing their jobs, fear of being in a new and unfamiliar setting. I struggled with this initially, my life experiences had taught me not to fear or worry about adverse events. I had always overcome and been strengthened by difficult transitions. As a school based administrator, my leadership traits had been forged from my experiences in the business world.

Leadership. I brought three traits that I had incorporated into my leadership style. I never approached any situation by rejecting any option immediately; no matter how farfetched it may first appear, I would never categorically dismiss it. Secondly, communication was a key to my leadership style. From our first meeting in the Media Center concerning the impending consolidation, I had been repeatedly told how appreciative all staff had felt that I had chosen to respect their professionalism by sharing what I knew with them in a timely manner. I took this lesson to heart, and reminded myself that this needed to remain at the forefront of all decisions I was to make. I emphasized rapid, open, truthful and empathetic communication. It became important to plan frequent meetings with the staff. Finally, without a high level of trust, and perceived fairness in decision making, managing conflict would be left to the winds of chance. Clawson (1999) contends that one of the four cornerstones of leadership is the demonstration of fairness and equity towards followers.

In leading the school consolidation process I attempted to stake a middle ground that identified me as a leader in the school consolidation process. My goal was to facilitate a smooth

consolidation for the two schools while balancing the interest of the School District. I could not afford to be seen as the principal of "your" school.

Conflict. One of the key challenges in the consolidation process was the management of conflict between the two staffs. One of the key ideas I brought into the process was recognition that each school had deep seated traditions and distinct school cultures. In looking at school culture four models are instructive. Deal and Peterson perceived culture as a web; while Barth saw culture as a complex pattern; Dufour on the other hand saw culture as a garden. However, Sergiovanni's description of culture as glue is the most apt when describing the conflicts and stresses inherent in a school consolidation. The motion of culture as a glue elicits notions of: Cohesiveness, Bringing minds together; Unifying, Constant monitoring, Time to bond, Smooth it out/even balance, and the use of a variety of bonding agents.

School Traditions. Sylvester Middle school traditions focused on building relationships with challenging students; maintaining a multi-cultural atmosphere between the diverse African-America, White and Hispanic populations that were almost evenly represented in the student body; and accepting the absence of strong parental involvement in favor of student advocacy by teachers and mentors. This model, the staff believed was the best that was available; given the school climate and the inability of many parents to speak English or understand the dominant middle class culture.

I highlight the traditions of the two schools in the management of conflict because it was clear from the first meeting of representatives of the two schools that two issues would define future discussions - maintaining the Back-to-Basics school philosophy and perceived fairness by all stakeholders. The team from the Back-to-Basics school immediately raised a question about who the leadership would consist of in the newly consolidated school. For them, this was a

critical factor in maintaining the continuity of the Back-to-Basics school traditions and philosophy. The team erroneously assumed that since the new school would be a Back-to-Basics school of choice with all the existing staff at the Back-to-Basics school simply moving to the new location housing the consolidated school. Any needed additional staff would then be selected using an open district application process.

The Sylvester Middle school team conversely, focused on the needs of the students and teachers. Who would attend this school? What would be the selection process for students and staff? Would Sylvester middle school students be grandfathered into the Back-to-Basics school? How would they adjust into this new stricter behavioral setting? What would happen to Sylvester middle school teachers who elected not to participate in the Back-to-Basics school concept? How would the middle class families, composed mostly of white families build a community with immigrant Hispanic families who often did not speak English or understand the mechanics of the choice application and acceptance process? How would marginalized low income black families adapt to the strict code of conduct and middle class social norms of the consolidated school?

Definition of Terms

The following definitions will be applicable and used for the purposes of this study:

- Consolidation: Consolidation or reorganization is the combining two or more districts to form a new school district as a new corporation under state laws (Anderson, 2009).

- Leader: an agent with more than just position or authority. I understand leadership to be an activity that is twofold: establishing a common purpose and establishing and guiding a plan of action. Leadership is conceptualized as a moral endeavor (Sergiovanni, 2007) and occurs within the political context of the organization (Malen & Cochran, 2008).

- Macro politics: Relate to the goals, values and culture of a broader society and the impact that federal and local government decisions and community influences have on the social life within the school. Achinstein (2002) states "schools cannot be understood without understanding the environment or larger social contexts in which they operate" (p. 427).

- Merger: While often used interchangeably with consolidation, a merger is defined as the joining of two disparate entities to make one new whole.

- Micro politics: Johnson (2001), stated that micro politics entails a social interaction or exchange in the political sphere in which individuals, coalitions and/or interest groups that exist within the school community seek to maximize the benefits, material or nonmaterial, derived from exchanges with others. These interactions revolve around the allocation of scarce and valued resources within the school and therefore are typically conflict-ridden. Micro-politics involves both conflict and cooperation (Blasé & Anderson, 1995) and involves how power operates in a school and how it influences the school and the school's outcomes (Anderson, 2009).There is no agreement in the literature of a single definition (Malen & Cochran, 2008) of micro-politics.

- Principal: A school principal is responsible for the instructional and managerial leadership of a single building within a school district. School principals are responsible for promoting the success of every student through development of vision and culture in a safe and effective learning environment (The Council of Chief State School Officers, 2008).

- Metropolitan School System: For this study a Metropolitan school system is defined using the 2006 National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) definition of school types

after working with the Census Bureau to create a new locale classification system referred to as the "urban-centric" classification system. Urbanized areas and urban clusters are densely settled "cores" of Census-defined blocks with adjacent densely settled surrounding areas. Core areas with populations of 50,000 or more are designated as urbanized areas; those with populations between 25,000 and 50,000 are designated as urban clusters. The term urban school system will thus refer to both urbanized areas and urban clusters.

Overview of the Dissertation

This case study seeks to describe how three school principals whose schools were consolidated and closed experienced the school consolidation process. It is organized into five chapters. The first chapter has addressed a statement of the problem, purpose of the study, an outline of the research questions and the presumed significance of the study.

Chapter Two reviews the relevant literature related to school consolidation and focuses on the micro political environment school leaders must navigate while addressing the constraints, challenges and tensions inherent in the uncertainties present during a time of transition at the school level.

Chapter Three provides a description of the methodology used to conduct the research study. It explains the theoretical framework, participant and location selection criteria, data collection methods and describes the modified constant comparative method used for data analysis. Finally there is a discussion around issues related to the role of reflexivity in minimizing potential researcher bias.

Chapter Four reports the analysis of data findings from interviews of the three principals selected as conversational partners. It includes principal biographies, interview data from the

three principals along with relevant documents structured around the conceptual framework outlined in chapter two.

Chapter Five examines the data collected from my interviews, identifies patterns, categories and themes that emerge from the data analysis based on data collected from the three interviewed principals who experienced a consolidation. I have introduced some insights and contrasts from my school consolidation experience as appropriate. Chapter 5 and this study conclude by discussing some implications for principals and possibly school districts faced with a school consolidation experience with some suggested areas for further research.

Summary

The consolidation process has been driven by the need to provide a more complete educational experience, but is more often influenced by financial and operational efficiency. In the current economic climate it is increasingly important for local and state governments to maximize efficiency and reduce costs to avoid further reductions in services or requesting tax increases from the voters. Fiscal constraints are likely to occur in future years and result in additional acts of consolidation. Yet the literature provides limited resources to guide school principals in managing the type of consolidation that is portrayed in this case study.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

Overview and Organization of Chapter

  This Chapter will provide an overview of the current literature and leadership practices as it relates to the school consolidation phenomenon. It begins with a definition of consolidation and outlines the historical trends and reasons why consolidation has become a more common tool of reform in the nation's pursuit of quality and efficiency in education.

  This Chapter examines the literature that exists with respect to the challenges faced when schools are consolidated and closed. The political dynamics and pressures that have accompanied consolidation are examined. The chapter looks at the current state of the literature as it relates to the politics and the role of leadership with an emphasis on the principals' roles and responsibilities since the conflict surrounding most consolidations makes it political.

  Finally, it should be noted that the literature review revealed that much of what is available deals with effective principal leadership practices during times of change, but little is revealed related to the principal's leadership in effecting the consolidation and closing of his/her school with another school within the same school district. This dissertation aims to contribute some insights toward filling in this gap.

What is School Consolidation?

  Consolidation is a process in which certain schools are closed, staff and students moved to an existing alternate school site or to a newly built site housing a larger student body than the

prior school. Two staffs, two student bodies, two school budgets become one. Closing a school is not a single process. The decision to close the school involves a legal consolidation process, while closing the building and physical plant deals with a physical consolidation process. Understanding the difference between these two processes is critical to understanding the leadership struggles and political dimensions of the experience (Norton, Webb, Dlugosh &Sybouts, 1996).

Legal consolidation refers largely to the legal action of closing an existing school, and merging two separate schools into one. In most states, the elected school board has the sole authority to take this action. This authority derives from the Boards' legal authority granted by the state legislature to organize the educational system within each school district. The physical consolidation addresses the logistics of closing one or more school buildings, building or renovating a new school and the resources needed to relocate students, staff and educational materials.

Consolidations often involve two schools, but there are instances in which multiple schools may be involved and are then consolidated into one school. In other cases not all the members or resources of a school may be directly involved in the entire consolidation process. All of one school may be involved with the closing (dissolving) part of the consolidation process, but parts of that school's population may then be dispersed or transferred as individual students or staff members to several different schools or other district work sites. The remaining students and staff composed of the other part of the school may then be involved as one large block in both the merging process with the other school affected by the consolidation process.

In the period between 1940 and 1990, despite a 70% increase in the U.S. population the total number of elementary and secondary schools declined from approximately 200,000 to 62,037. Also, since 1938, the number of school districts nationwide has declined by 100,000 or 90 percent (Duncombe & Yinger, 2007). This rapid restructuring of school and school districts has been mostly due to

consolidation. School and District consolidation has been implemented in states as diverse as New York, Iowa, Louisiana, West Virginia, Montana, Kentucky, and Arkansas and Florida.

There is often a belief among policy makers that consolidation of schools and/or school districts would save tax dollars and improve the delivery of educational services. However, research described by Boex and Martinez-Vasquez (1998) indicates that consolidation involves issues other than the cost-effective delivery of services. These factors may include economies of scale, optimum school size, educational and social outcomes of independence and merger, community impacts, and the outcomes for teachers, staff, and students (Boex & Martinez-Vasquez, 1998).

District and School Consolidation

Most research studies fail to make a clear distinction between the consolidation of school districts and the consolidation of schools within a district. In some cases the term "consolidation" is used generically to refer to both "school consolidation" and "district consolidation". The distinction is important for this study. This study is focused on school consolidation.

School and school district consolidation is the process of combining schools and/or school district administrative functions for the purpose of improving operating efficiency, quality and/or expanding educational opportunities (Nitta, Holley, & Wrobel, 2010). Fitzwater (1953) defines consolidation as "the merging of two or more attendance areas to form a larger school" (Peshkin, 1982, p. 4).

District Consolidation. Few studies have attempted to explain the causes of school consolidation and the three commonly cited studies deal only with district consolidations and may be summarized briefly. David Strang (1987) argues that consolidation came about primarily as a result of efforts by state-level politicians and professional educators to centralize and professionalize the

administration of public education. He finds that school districts were consolidated more quickly and extensively where the state government's share of education funding was higher.

Kenny and Schmidt (1994) in the second study, note first, that states with greater income heterogeneity experienced less consolidation and secondly, the decline in farm employment, increasing population density, and falling costs of transporting students were among the most important factors contributing to the decline in the number of school districts. A few state governments (e.g., Florida, Maryland, and Nevada) influenced consolidation more directly by mandating the consolidation of school districts to conform to county boundaries.

The third commonly cited study to examine district consolidation was done by Alesina, Alberto, Baqir, and Hoxby (2000). They noted that less consolidation took place in counties that were more racially, ethnically, or religiously diverse. This suggested that population diversity has been one of the few significant barriers to the consolidation of local school districts.

School Consolidation. Haunschild, Moreland, & Murrell (1994), characterize a school consolidation or merger as the amalgamation of two formerly independent schools into one organizational entity with the primary purpose being to reduce the expenses for wages, plant operations and accommodation.

The consolidation of two schools, and the closing of one of them, should always produce savings because physical plant and maintenance costs are eliminated in one of the schools, and personnel costs may be reduced. Also, the lease or sale of the physical plant from the closed school can produce additional revenues for the district. The combining of two school districts, on the other hand, may or may not result in savings (Young & Green, 2005).

My research study focuses on the consolidation of two schools within one school district, resulting in the closing of one of the two schools. Therefore, I will discuss topics related to

district consolidations only when such discussion provides some insight into better understanding school consolidations. Additionally, it should be noted that the terms merger and consolidation are often used interchangeably in the literature. I will also use these terms interchangeably in this study.

Decisions to Consolidate Schools

School mergers entail bringing together two previously independent organizations to become one organization. Doing this always involves changes in the basic policies, procedures, and the resource allocation of one or both organizations. Consequently, issues of fairness and justice inevitably arise in any effort concerning organizational mergers (Citera & Rentsch, 1993; Cobb, Wooten, & Folger, 1995). In educational mergers, the better academically performing or more affluent school community often angles to be perceived as the dominant partner. Dominance, being defined as the power and influence a merger partner has in the post-merger organization (van Knippenberg, Monden, & de Lima, 2002; Marks & Mirvis, 2001; Meyer, 2001).

In a school merger, the intention to merge is typically not requested by the managements of the merging schools themselves, but by the authorized decision making body, often the School Board. Therefore, a typical characteristic of most school mergers is the fact that they are not voluntary actions and this fact impacts their success, because experiences with mergers in institutions of higher education indicate that forced or managed mergers are less successful than voluntary mergers (Skodvin, 1999).

School Closings. Although the authorizing educational agency may strive to implement mergers-of-equals rather than acquisitions, it is rare in reality for two pre-merger schools to contribute equally to the shape of the post-merger school (van Oudenhoven & de Boer, 1995).

For instance, only one out of two previous school-buildings can remain after the merger, the building of the other pre-merger school has to be closed and therefore dissolved. Furthermore, only one out of two previous principals can head the new school. The other former principal has to be displaced to another school. Even though typically a noticeable status difference between pre-merger schools may not exist prior to a merger, the outcome of the redistribution within a school merger is more or less reflected in a post-merger status differential of winner and loser (Clayton & Opotow, 2003). Decision making influence and resources would be at the discretion of the winners. For example, keeping or loosing cultural symbols might identify which pre-merger school has higher status after the merger and which one has lower status (Citera & Rentsch, 1993*)*

Macro-Politics of Education

Macro politically, public schools are not insulated organizations and are expected to reflect the goals, values and culture of a broader society. Achinstein (2002) states "schools cannot be understood without understanding the environment or larger social contexts in which they operate" (p. 427). In recent years, as schools face the implications of contracting local and state budgets, strong macro political influences have increased political conflict at the school level (Blase & Bjork, 2009; Boyd, 1982, 1983). Consequently, micro political structures that exist in schools are often shaped by their macro political realities (Boyd, 1982).

These macro political forces constitute one of the two legs of my conceptual framework. The other leg is the micro-political forces that are found within the school community. Within this micro-political frame, many school leaders acknowledge difficulty in speaking around issues of equity and power, and are often ill prepared to advocate for and collaborate with communities that have little political power (McLean, 2003).

Politics and School Consolidation

Political struggles in education have been defined by conflict over values of efficiency, quality, choice, and equity (Stout, Tallerico, & Scribner, 1995). School consolidation processes often cause political controversy as they are cast into win-lose frameworks, with state policy-makers and school administrators advocating consolidation and locals opposing it, in general. In addition to opposition, the historical trends toward school consolidation, particularly in rural schools and in some urban areas have been associated with communities experiencing suburban flight or economic depression. McDermott (1999) studied how consolidation had often reflected a very political process in which powerful local interests were pitted against equity arguments embedded within state and federal policies resulting from the civil rights movement, federal legislation and court rulings that tacitly spoke to using consolidation as part of integration and the pursuit of more equitable opportunities.

The early struggles focused on the efficacy of consolidations revolving around the values of quality and efficiency, now the debate has shifted to issues of choice and equity. For example, Miller-Kahn and Smith (2001) found that in a school district in Colorado, interest groups took advantage of choice policy frameworks to mold a system that met individual interests above the common good. Furthermore, McLean (2003) points to the "tension between democratic ideals and the hard realities of system planning" (p. 140) in which all too often decisions become politicized and public forums often result in discourse about "them" and "others".

This study will examine the school consolidation experiences of school principals as it relates to the four macro-political values of efficiency, quality, choice and equity that form one of the two parts of my conceptual framework used in this study. The other part of my conceptual framework deals with micro-politics and the negotiations of the school principal.

Efficiency

From roughly 1930 to 1970, a rapid movement toward centralization and professionalization reduced the number of schools by more than 100,000, while the average size of a school increased fivefold. The leading education reformer of the early twentieth century, Ellwood P. Cubberley (1922), pressed three primary arguments in favor of school consolidation. First, larger schools allowed for more efficient, centralized administration. Second, consolidation held the promise of highly specialized instruction and third, a consolidated school could provide better facilities at lower cost (Cubberley, 1922).

Rural School Consolidation. David B. Tyack argues that the school consolidation movement began in the early1890s as part of Progressive Era reform efforts to create an efficient, punctual, predictable and orderly bureaucratic organization in rural schools. At that time, rural schools were judged to be deficient and harsh educational settings and large urban schools were adopted as a model to reform and improve them. Consolidation would result in a broader and more contemporary course of study by providing better-qualified teachers and resources (Theobald, 1988; Tyack, 1974).

In spite of resistance in some local communities, the school consolidation movement continued to flourish in the years after World War II. According to the National Rural Education Association (NREA), Cold War tensions increased concerns that small high schools, most of which were rural, did not develop the type of human capital necessary to compete internationally. Significantly, in the ten years between 1950 and 1960, the number of school districts in the U.S. was halved from 83,718 to 40,500 (Sher, 1977).

Economic Factors

A series of economic downturns in rural areas contributed further to the emphasis on school consolidation. Smith (1974) noted that from 1933 to 1970 the net migration from farms

was more than 30 million people. As a result, rural public school enrollment declined and the cost of educating rural students started to rise. In order to save teacher jobs and maintain quality curricula, some school districts began voluntarily consolidating programs and facilities. The farm crisis of the 1980s led to the loss of family farms in favor of large-scale mechanized operations, again resulting in declining school enrollments and the loss of more rural graduates to urban areas where work was more plentiful (Lasley, Leistritz, Labao & Meyer, 1995).

Urban School Consolidation. In the 1980's, declining enrollments were the main reason for closing schools. According to a recent report on school consolidation, in the time period 1990-2001 over 300 schools have been closed in West Virginia (Eyre & Finn, 2002). During this time economic forces have impacted the relative influence and budgets of school boards vis-à-vis the states contributions. By 2000 only 57% of school funding nationally came from local sources. Within local school boards, members have been representing larger and more diverse constituencies, which suggest less responsiveness to certain constituent needs (Berry, 2005).

The U.S. Census reports that in the period 2000-2010 the number of people younger than 18 fell by 3% or about ½ a million in the Midwest. In the last fifteen years, the demand for school consolidations has increased in this region. The USA Today of Wednesday August 8, 2012; based on an analysis of U.S Department of Education data shows that between 2006-07 through 2010-11, Midwestern states experienced a net loss of more than 2,100 schools. The states of Michigan, Ohio and Minnesota accounted for 1,694 of these school closings.

The loss of manufacturing jobs in the Midwest has also been a significant contributor to the demographic shifts of the last fifteen years. For example, the Warren City School District in Ohio consolidated the number of schools from 14 to five in two years citing the loss of jobs

provided by the closed steel industry that was the main employer in the county. The Chicago

Public Schools (CPS) is an urban example of this trend. Between 2001 and 2006 it closed 38

schools. Most of the schools were closed either for low enrollment relative to the school's

capacity (17 schools) or for chronic underperformance (9 schools) (de La Torre, M. & Gwynne,

J., 2009). Meanwhile, school districts in the West and South mainly in California, Texas and

Arizona saw a net gain of 965 schools due to population growth.

The issue of school consolidation has demanded the attention of most school districts

serving large urban populations. Factors such as court mandates for desegregation, urban flight,

diminishing financial resources, souring operational costs, and declining enrollments have added

urgency to the issue.

Metropolitan School Consolidation Pre-2005. The politics of school location and

community growth and development has had a long history in American education. Robert

Alford (1960) has argued that the location of a newly constructed or consolidated school building

has been a major issue that superintendents had to deal with when attempting to consolidate

schools. W. Cecil Steward (1999) states that schools have tried to anticipate future growth and be

the first to acquire developable property in suburban areas—the best land at the cheapest price.

Steward argues that because people want to live near schools, the school system become the

most influential planning entity (public or private) in promoting the suburban sprawl pattern of

American cities.

Metropolitan School Consolidation Post – 2005. From 2007 to the present time K-12

educational institutions in Florida and other states are in the midst of dealing with a national

recession and budget cuts that have resulted in fiscal constraints coupled with the demands of

high stakes accountability for student performance. As a result, school leaders are called upon to

navigate the politics of school closings and consolidations as one way to respond to the demands imposed by the current financial climate.

The Effects of the 2008 Recession

In light of a slow economic recovery from the recession of 2008, all levels of government have been forced to maximize efficiency and minimize costs wherever possible to prevent further service reductions or the necessity for a tax increase amidst ongoing budgetary woes. For instance, in the state of Indiana revenues dropped 12.3 percent over two years (Berry, 2010) and states across the nation face estimated aggregate budget gaps of over $83 billion for the 2011 fiscal year (National Conference of State Legislators, 2010). According to an American Association of School Administrators survey 6 percent of school districts closed or consolidated schools during the 2008-2009 school year. Another 11 percent were considering school closings or consolidations in 2010-2011.

School Size and Student Achievement. Research by Cox (2002), and Howley and Bickel (2000) have indicated a strong relationship between school size and student achievement as one way to measure efficiency in schools. There have been two identifiable waves of literature on school size (Howley, 1993). The first wave of studies, appearing roughly from the 1920s through the 1970s, focused primarily on input measures of school quality (Stemnock, 1974). The second wave of research beginning in the 1980s, shifted from a focus on input measures to output measures like student achievement.

This second wave of studies has generally been less favorable to large schools. Of the seven studies of school size and student performance reviewed by Andrews, Duncombe and Yinger (2002); only one, Kenny (1982), found that large size was positively correlated to high achievement. The remaining six studies found the opposite to be true. Four of these studies

suggested that the relationship between school size and achievement is non-linear (Andrews, Duncombe, & Yinger, 2002). Summers and Wolf (1977) find that African American students are particularly harmed by large school size, and Lee and Smith (1997) also find that students of low socio-economic status do particularly poorly in large schools.

While efficiency of expenditure should be a consideration, enrichment of the student—socially and educationally—should be the primary value. In a purely cost-driven system, magnet schools, special equipment, libraries, art teachers, health services, guidance counselors, and help for special needs students might be cut back or dispensed with altogether.

Following consolidation, schools are able to offer broader curricula including more elective and Advanced Placement classes (Benton, 1992; Self, 2001). However, this finding is complicated by evidence that students in the largest schools also learn less. Moreover, this negative achievement pattern in extremely large schools has been found to be more pronounced among minorities and disadvantaged students (Lee & Smith, 1997).

Mary Anne Raywid (1999) concluded that "When viewed on a cost-per-student basis, small schools are somewhat more expensive. But when examined on the basis of the number of students they graduate, they are less expensive than either medium-sized or large high schools" (p. 2). From reviewing the literature, it appears that there is not an ideal or optimal school size that is universally agreed upon.

Cost Factors. Boex and Martinez-Vasquez (1998) concluded that as high school enrollments increased, the cost per student decreased. A 10% increase in high school enrollment, would result in savings of $7 per student. However, they found no economies of scale at the elementary school level. Relationships among costs, size, and educational performance are non-

linear (Trostel & Reilly, 2005). The trick seems to be to have schools that are large enough to capture economies of scale, but not so large that diseconomies are experienced.

Mahloit and Black (2003) pointed to the example of school consolidation in West Virginia and assert that large consolidated schools have been unable to show any significant cost savings and at times, have proven to be more expensive because of increases in discipline, dropouts, and absenteeism. Some researchers have asked if larger schools produced greater academic success at a lower cost. Mostly, the answer has been no, but with one qualification; Howley (1994) reports evidence that students in high socioeconomic status communities perform better in larger schools. Small size seems to benefit minority and low-income students more than middle- and upper-class students, say Valerie E. Lee and Julia B. Smith (1996).

Since the early 1900s, proponents of consolidation have seen it as a means of ensuring educational equity and resource efficiency. In particular, they cite economies of scale and broader curricula as evidence supporting consolidation (Duncombe & Yinger, 2007). But, research going back to the '70s does not support this contention. For example, Lu and Tweeten (1973) found that achievement scores were reduced by 2.6 points for fourth-grade students for every hour spent riding a bus. High school students were not affected as adversely as students in elementary school, losing only 0.5 points per hour spent riding a bus. A 2003 study of school district consolidations identified five potential sources of cost savings resulting from larger size: indivisibilities, increased dimension, specialization, learning and innovation, and price benefits (Duncombe & Yinger, 2003). These factors although written in reference to school district consolidation are quite often applicable to school consolidations.

Indivisibilities. Indivisibilities refer to services provided to each student by certain education professionals, which do not diminish in quality as the number of students' increases.

For example, efficiencies may be realized in the area of support personnel such as librarians, guidance counselors, school nurses, and curriculum development staff.

Increased Dimension. Increased dimension refers to the fact that larger units can produce output at a lower average cost. For example, heating and cooling plants, communication systems, and improved transportation routing, maximum building utilization, and elimination of duplicate facilities may lower average costs.

Specialization. Specialization presumes that a larger school may be able to employ more specialized labor such as advanced math and science teachers and foreign language instructors.

Learning and Innovation. Finally, learning and innovation presumes that larger schools/districts can implement innovations at lower cost and teachers can be more productive because they can draw on the experience of many colleagues.

Price Benefits

Price benefits allow larger schools/districts to negotiate lower prices on supplies and equipment, and can use a type of monopoly power to impose conditions that may be more favorable to the employer regarding, the type and quality of benefits, wages and working conditions.

Transportation. The invention of the automobile and paving of roads allowed students to travel longer distances making the consolidation of rural schools more feasible. The rise of industry in urban areas in the late nineteenth century also contributed to the school consolidation movement. Early school reformers and policy makers felt that an industrialized society required all schools to look alike, and began to advocate more of an urban, centralized model of education (Kay, Hargood, & Russell, 1982).

Transportation issues are often cited as one of the most negative consequence of consolidation (Lewis, 2003; Sell, Leitstritz & Thompson, 1996). Lengthy, onerous bus rides are not just inconvenient and potentially damaging to students' academics, but create negative budget implications for the district as well.

Quality

I will examine academic performance, relationships affecting students student learning opportunities social environment for students, school size, business reasons, national security reasons and the role of the Federal government.

Academic Performance. Concerning academic performance, the main argument in favor of closing low performing schools is that doing so provides an opportunity for students to attend higher performing schools with stronger learning environments. For example, the New York City Department of Education, controlled by the mayor, closed two dozen public schools in 2003 because their test scores were too low. Many of the alternative schools opened by the City were small charter schools designed to provide parents with educational choice. A study of the closed schools by the city's independent budget office found that these schools had disproportionate numbers of the city's neediest students. That is, students' who are ethnic minorities, homeless, who don't speak English, who receive special education, or who have other high needs (Ravitch, 2011).

Philip J. Meranto (1970) has suggested that polarization within the metropolitan area has resulted in a sorting-out process. Higher income white families sought to build high quality new schools in the suburbs while low income white and a disproportionately high number of black students remained in central city schools that intensified the handicaps of this group of students due, in part, to the lack of ample fiscal resources, racist teachers, and out of touch curriculum

(Meranto, 1970). For example, students in high-minority schools have limited access to high-level courses and a challenging curriculum (Darling-Hammond, 2007).

Research has also found that on every measure of teacher qualification—certification, subject matter background, pedagogical training, quality of college attended, test scores, or experience—schools serving low-income and minority students, those schools most vulnerable to school closure for low-performance, have less qualified teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2007; Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2002; National Center for Educational Statistics, 1997).

Relationships Affecting Students. A school merger forces students to change their school-related social identity in favor of adopting a new post-merger school identity that includes the members of the other pre-merger school. This situation is likely to cause a threat to the distinctiveness of one pre-merger school from the other pre-merger school, because students have to incorporate characteristics that are now shared with the other pre-merger school in their self-perception. In the intergroup relations research on mergers it was noted that social identity threat is an important factor in the success or failure of a merger (Bartels, Douwes, de Jong, & Pruyn, 2006; Shin, 2003; Terry & O'Brien, 2001; Tischendorf, 2007).

Student Learning Opportunities

In addition to the identity threat, a school merger usually initiates redistributions of material as well as human resources between the pre-merger schools. Conflict over scarce resources between the merger partners almost unavoidably occurs during any attempt at a merger (Hegtvedt, 2005; Meyer, 2001; Citera & Rentsch, 1993; LeVine & Campbell, 1972). For example, if one pre-merger school has less access to resources and power than the other pre-merger school, the social identity of the students of the disadvantaged pre-merger school may be particularly threatened by a school merger. Therefore, these students may be inclined to show in-

group bias as a source of self-enhancement (Terry & O'Brien, 2001). This competitive intergroup situation may accentuate differences between the two groups and raise questions of group-related entitlement and justice (Blake & Moúton, 1985, Gaertner, Bachman, Dovidio, & Banker, 2001; Meyer, 2001).

Social Environment for Students

Research on the experiences of those directly affected by consolidation is not only limited, it is often contradictory. One relevant example is the relationship between school size and a school's social environment. Some assert that larger; consolidated schools provide improved social opportunities because students have access to a broader and more diverse network of friends (Sell, Leistritz, & Thompson, 1996). Further, it has been suggested that the relative anonymity of larger schools is beneficial to students' social wellbeing because in smaller environments individual and family reputations are more difficult to shed. Conflicts between students, between students and teachers, and among staff in smaller schools are more difficult to avoid or ignore (Lee, Smerdon, Alfed-Liro, & Brown, 2000; McClelland, 1997).

Critics of school closings also emphasize the disruption that moving to a new school causes in terms of social capital formation. According to Sunderman and Payne (2009), students who transfer are at risk of losing important relationships and the support they need to be academically successful. Accommodating a large number of new students could create tension and stress for the staff, especially if these schools lack resources to integrate the displaced students.

Concerning students, Jim Lewis (2004) writing for Challenge West Virginia reported that students and parents observed that consolidated schools, with their larger enrollment, caused some students who are not particularly outgoing, don't cause discipline problems or are not

particularly outstanding in some area to disappear and fall through the cracks. Others, because of the autonomy, become anxious, often do not do well academically, become discipline problems, give up on school and drop out. Lewis (2004) further states that closing of community-based schools has taken a real bite out of extracurricular activities. The student must endure the long bus ride or drive to school; attend the extracurricular activity, and then either take a late bus or drive home, tired and exhausted from the activity. Additionally, due to the larger numbers and competition for spots on the team, some will not be able to participate because they would not be "good enough" to make the team.

School Size. The success of consolidation and its effects and processes, are disputed in the literature. Research on small schools has highlighted their benefits such as the creation of democratic community (Malhoit & Black, 2003), intimate knowledge of student needs (Howley, A., & Howley, C., 2006), and improved learning, increased school satisfaction, and lower dropout rates for disadvantaged students (Strange, 2002). Kathleen Cotton's (1996) review of the research found that poor students and those of a racial and ethnic minority are more adversely affected when attending large schools.

A research study done at Columbia University showed that small schools had "strengths of smallness" not evident in large schools (Nachtigal, 1982). These strengths included a higher number of students involved in extracurricular activities, more attention by teachers due to lower pupil teacher ratio, and students who had a close connection to their communities. The Columbia University study does not appear to support the assumption that the quality of school life is better when small schools consolidate or in larger schools.

From the standpoint of School Boards and district leadership, one thought Nachtigal presents is that when consolidation happens, board of education members are responsible for

more constituents than before leading to struggles over resource allocation and access. Therefore, according to Barnett, Ritter, and Lucas (2002) school and district consolidation can have positive, negative, or negligible effects on student performance and each individual situation must be analyzed carefully while examining alternatives to consolidation.

Business Reasons. At the school level, in addition to policy-makers and education professionals, White argues that private businesses, in the interest of financial gain, have encouraged school consolidation. For example, International Harvester Company, a major manufacturer of school buses was a major promoter of school consolidation in the 1930s (White, 1981). These business government linkages in support of school consolidation are still evident today. In West Virginia, the legislature appointed a School Building Authority (SBA), to fund capital improvements for school districts. In order to gain approval from the SBA for improvements, districts had to meet mandated enrollment levels set by the state, which forced consolidation of small schools.

National Security Reasons. The political climate in which consolidation efforts have flourished has also been based on international competitiveness (DeYoung, 1989; Spring, 1987). Both Sputnik and the Cold War created increased concerns that small high schools, most of which were rural, were not developing the kind of human capital needed to promote national security (Ravitch, 1983). Large schools continued to be touted as the best way to efficiently and effectively educate the nation's young people.

The Role of the Federal Government

Another issue in consolidations is the role of the Federal Government in initiating consolidations. This is found mostly in urban areas where districts are closing schools as a reform strategy to deal with chronically low performing schools. The Federal No Child Left

Behind Act (NCLB) reinforces this trend. Under NCLB, schools that have not made adequate yearly progress (AYP) after four years, as measured on state standardized assessments, have been required to implement a restructuring plan, which includes various forms of closing schools.

Today, school reconstitutions and closures continue to be federally sanctioned under the Obama administration (Center on Education Policy, 2008) using $3.5 billion in Title I School Improvement grants, budgeted to turn around the nation's lowest performing schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). In order for school districts to compete for the grants, the U.S. Department of Education often mandates that the school district pursue one of four reform models. Among these models is the "turnaround model"; which replaces the principal and rehires no more than 50% of the staff. The other reform models include adopting a "restart model" (converting a school or closing and reopening it as a charter school), "school closure" (closing a school and transferring students to other schools in the district), and a "transformation model" (replacing the principal and instituting other reform measures).

School Choice. While specific strategies have been developed related to consolidation, not all districts successfully maneuver through school closings or consolidation (Anderson, 2009; Boyd & Wheaton, 1983). Urban school districts have had a less successful track record of closing schools because of the political orientation of school board members towards responding to constituent pressures (especially since they are often elected from particular areas of a city rather than at large), and a greater focus on equity and program quality over efficiency and economy. In addition, since urban school districts are often less racially homogenous, diversity issues are often raised (Boyd & Wheaton, 1983).

There are two primary ways that districts have closed schools. The district closes the school building and transfers students and staff to another public school or the district closes the school and reopens it under new leadership and staff. The former is classified as "dissolution" while the latter is classified as a "reconstitution".

Dissolution. In general, mergers can exist on a continuum between merger-of-equals at one end and acquisitions at the other end. A merger-of-equals symbolizes that two pre-merger organizations contribute equally to the organizational shape of the new post-merger organization. The merger-of-equals is termed integration and results in the equal integration of the norms and values of both pre-merger organizations (Mottola, Bachman, Gaertner, & Dovidio, 1997). In the context of school mergers, this integration process often includes creating a completely new name for the post-merger school. Alternately, at the other end of the continuum; an acquisition results in one pre-merger organization taking over the other pre-merger organization. In this instance, the post-merger organization is highly influenced by the acquiring organization and generally the acquired organization has to adapt to the norms and values of the dominant organization (Jansen, 2000; Mottola et al., 1997). The pre-merger organization will cease to exist and is dissolved. This is the type of school consolidation described in this study.

Reorganization/Reconstitution

Reconstituting the school, is a process where some or all of the teachers, administrators, and staff are replaced, but the school continues to exist. Reconstitution, similar to some school closings, is a strategy for providing a "fresh start" by removing the schools incumbent administrators and teachers and replacing them with others who presumably are more capable and committed to reforming the educational program and organizational structures (Malen, et al., 2009).

The School Choice Options

As school choice has gained traction and prominence in educational reform, one of the options available is to re-open the school as a charter school if permitted under state law, or turning operation of the school over to a private educational management organization (EMO). The majority of the states (40 plus the District of Columbia) have enacted legislation that allows opening of charter schools. They are publicly funded schools that are free of most rules and regulations of the district. Overall, a limited number of students have taken advantage of the choice options (magnets, charters, vouchers, district choice) available to them; however it will continue to be an increasingly important theme of educational policy (Fuller, Elmore, & Orfield, 1996).

The research (Hess, 2003) on reconstitution, charter schools, or schools operated by EMOs suggests that the new schools are not necessarily better than the schools they replace (student achievement may improve in some situations, but does not appear to improve across the board) and are often accompanied by negative side effects. Reconstitution sometimes fails to attract more qualified teachers or to retain the most capable teachers, results in high teacher and administrator turnover, and leaves staff with little capacity to offer a coherent educational program for students (Rice & Croninger, 2005).

In Chicago, which reconstituted seven high schools in 1997, reconstitution was not particularly successful in improving the quality of teaching, in changing the structure or culture of the schools, or improving student achievement, and was dropped by the district after the 2001-02 school year (Hess, 2003).

School choice options such as magnet and charter schools, open enrollment programs and the provisions of vouchers that allow parents to shop for their preferred school setting is a

significant factor in some sections of the nation creating the need to close schools. The school choice movement has been championed at state and national levels and the impact of these programs is especially evident in the Detroit, Milwaukee, and Minnesota closures. In Detroit, over 40,000 students attend schools outside the public schools. Charter schools and open enrollment were cited as reasons for closing schools in Minnesota districts.

Equity

Here I will examine the relationships between two merging organizations, community conflicts and politics and the relationships involving stakeholders.

Relationships between Two Merging Organizations. The literature on community reaction to consolidation has focused on community resistance to school mergers or closings. Phrases such as "loss of community identity" or "loss of community attachment" are common (Peshkin, 1978; Fitchen, 1991; Biere, 1995; Nachtigal, 1982; Luloff & Swanson, 1990). School mergers, like mergers in general, alter the social order by imposing new group memberships on students and staff members. Such a situation is likely to engender hostile intergroup relations between the members of two merging organizations. These intergroup tensions result from the motivation that group members strive to establish an optimal position for their own pre-merger group in the new post-merger organization (Haunschild et al., 1994; Terry, 2001).

Community Conflicts and Politics. Local resistance to consolidation was often fierce, especially in areas where the school was the central institution of the community. Thus, consolidation of the local district and in particular the loss of the local school often threatened a community's social cohesion and economic vitality. A study by Lyson (2002) looked at the fiscal impact and socioeconomic effects of consolidation on communities in New York, most of which once had a school. He found that towns that lost their school had a lower social and fiscal

capacity compared to towns that maintained their schools. Another study completed in Ohio in 1997 by Brasington found that doubling the size of a school lowered student proficiency rates by 1% and lowered the average prices of nearby homes by $400.

Closing a school is a politically difficult decision for any district and the dialogue surrounding school consolidation is polarized. School Boards learn very quickly that plans to close a school are directly affected by the actions and reactions of the many constituencies in the community. Community members argue that the loss of a school means the loss of the community, and the discussion continues to be cast into a win-lose framework. Wood and Boyd (1981) state:

> A neighborhood school meant a positive, proprietary attitude of
> local residents toward their school system; it meant greater safety
> for children and less anxiety for parents; and it meant a higher
> quality education. Learning among peers from the local neighborhood,
> stability in classroom composition, and the relatively greater
> responsiveness of a local school to specific community needs and
> expectations were all thought to embrace learning. But most of all, a
> neighborhood school was a matter of morale. It symbolized the identity of
> a community and the respect which the district as a whole was willing to
> pay to one of its individual parts. And it became, in turn, more than a place
> for children since it was valued for its own sake (p. 98).

In the period following World War I, there was a growing realization that consolidation of small schools with larger systems offered more advantages than disadvantages, but this realization didn't always come easily. However; the opportunity for children to get a better

education in a more adequate facility with varied resources overcame most objections. While inadequate facilities are no longer central to the debate, transportation, equity, community, social and ethnic pride, and improved opportunities for students and teachers are still major considerations in school consolidation controversies.

Relationships Involving Stakeholders

In the New York City Department of Education experience with school closings described previously; when public hearings were held by the Education Department, thousands of students, parents, and teachers turned out to protest the closing of their schools. Large numbers of students and parents from charter schools also turned out; they had been bused in by charter sponsors to urge the panel to close the schools so that charters could get their space (Ravitch, 2011). Although the event was advertised as a "hearing," the audience understood that the majority of the panel was not listening, and nothing they might say would change the outcome. How will they be heard?

Micro-Politics of Education

Since the 1970s, concern for scarce federal resources, declining state public school funding, lack of public confidence in schools, and news reports demanding public school excellence have caused educators to focus more closely on the politics in and around schools (Boyd, 1982, 1983; Marshall & Scribner, 1991). Out of these concerns, the study of the micro politics of education was born. Since public schools as organizations are open systems with constant interactions between school community members, the micro politics of education show how interpersonal relationships are structured in terms of rules, norms, lines of communications and decision making structures.

Johnson (2001), stated that micro politics entails a social interaction or exchange in the political sphere in which individuals, coalitions and/or interest groups that exist within the school community seek to maximize the benefits, material or nonmaterial, derived from exchanges with others. These interactions revolve around the allocation of scarce and valued resources and therefore are typically conflict-ridden (Johnson, 2001).

Organizations are often comprised of members with common and divergent interests, even though organizational structures are created by individuals to support the collaborative pursuit of specified goals (Scott, 2002). Subsequently, the micro political perspective challenges the shared values and goals, formal power arrangements and an objective notion of organizational life (Achinstein, 2002). These traditional perspectives of organizations do not account for the everyday lived experiences of those inside the organization. Micro political theories instead spotlight individual differences, goals, diversity, conflict, uses of informal power and the negotiated and interpretive nature of organizations (Achinstein, 2002).

Conflict emerges as internal and external groups, with competing values or priorities, seek to have their priorities prevail (Marshall & Scribner, 1991). Macro political pressures, such as reduced public school funding, also have the potential to erode teacher morale, stifle school climate and derail the success of school initiatives and educational change (Boyd, 1983). Principals thus face the dual task of balancing federal, state and local interest groups that seek to influence local public schools and also managing and negotiating within internal micro political structures, which include various informal teachers groups, individual teachers and the union, and parents (Bacharach & Mundell, 1993).

However, Tooms, Kretovics and Smialek (2007) found that principals view politics as a "necessary evil" needed to articulate a vision that enhances or maintains the school. During these

interactions, principals are expected to act as protectors of their organizations against macro political external interest groups such as federal and state leaders that seek resources (Willower, 1991); and make sound decisions, while staying loyal to the district administrative group (Marshall, 1985). It is therefore important for principals to be politically savvy in order to ensure successful leadership.

Micro-Politics of School Leadership

Understanding micro political concepts, such as power, conflict, ideological orientation and control of resources (time, materials, personnel, and territory) is critical to a principals understanding of their school as an arena of struggle, and which parties will seek access to and control of resources (Ball, 1987). Principals can start understanding their micro political environments through daily interactions. Wolcott (1984) described the daily experiences of a seasoned elementary school principal.

Leadership

Leadership is a topic that has fascinated both scholars and practitioners for centuries. Bass (1985) has observed that we know a great deal about leaders but very little about leadership. While a leader may be defined as an agent with more than just position or authority, leadership is often understood to be an activity that is twofold: establishing a common purpose and establishing and guiding a plan of action. Burns (1978) describes leadership as consisting of two strands, transactional leadership and transformational leadership; where transactional leadership is leadership based upon exchanges between the leader and followers with the overall aim and outcome being the maintenance of the status quo and stability (Blasé & Anderson, 1995). Transformational leadership on the other hand, is focused on change; specifically, change

in the culture of the school. It is this type of leadership that is applicable to the consolidation experience.

    Qualities of a Leader. Bennis (1989) noted that the basic ingredients of real leaders are integrity, dedication, magnanimity, humility, openness, and creativity. While (Halfon, 1989) defines a leader with integrity as one who "maintains a consistent commitment to do what is best – especially under conditions of adversity and doing what is promised when it is promised" (p.36).

    Kouzes and Posner (2002) surveyed more than 75,000 people internationally and asked participants to select qualities that they "most look for and admire in a leader, someone whose direction they would willingly follow" (p. 24). The results showed that 88% of participants selected honesty as one of the top qualities they admire in a leader. Russell and Stone (2002), described honesty as the foundation of a trusting relationship between leaders and followers and the lack of deliberate deception, being truthful and transparent "in the face of challenging and potentially self-damaging circumstances" (p. 149).

    Martin (1998) believed that trust in a leader is the core of credibility and Bennis and Nanus (1985) stated "Trust is the emotional glue that binds followers and leaders together" (p. 153). Salka (2004) described the importance of organizational trust in its leader. "The only thing that makes it possible for people to tolerate uncertainty, confusion, and pain that accompanies change is trust. When they are stressed their confidence in the leader acts like a force field that contains their fear and anxiety" (p. 62). Trust resides in the followers, not the leader. Sashkin and Sashkin (2003) summarized these leadership attributes by noting that a leader's trustworthiness, or credibility, is demonstrated through actions of consistency, honesty, and integrity.

Leadership Practices/Principles. Ryan (2005) has suggested that there are three basic

elements of leadership practice; relationships, the leaders role, and the ends of leadership. For

example, are the leaders relationships based on hierarchical or horizontal principles? In terms of

leadership roles; is leadership exercised by one individual or is it shared? Finally, when

considering the ends to which leadership aspires to attain; is the purpose organized to maintain

the status quo, or do the ends sought by the leader challenge existing paradigms?

As expected, scholars hold different views on these matters. Jaques (1988), for example,

has suggested that leadership is designed in a hierarchical structure. While scholars like Gronn

(2002) and Ryan, (2002) have sought to present a more collective view. Taylor et al. (2008)

noted that those holding more traditional, hierarchical views have identified leadership as a

position, while Gronn and Spillane (2006) argued that leadership should be viewed as a process.

Astin and Astin (2000) agreed that the practice of leadership is a process ultimately concerned

with fostering change; it is not a managerial task designed to preserve or maintain established

organizational norms or functions. Antonakis, Avolio, and Sivasubramaniam (2003) noted that

change involves a sequence of activities, not random occurrences. Therefore, leadership is a

purposeful process which is inherently value based.

Riggio and Conger (2007) have suggested that the practice of good leadership is "doing

the right thing under particular circumstances-taking into account the tasks, the followers, the

situation, the timing, and the process" (p. 123). Other researchers like Leithwood, K., Day, C.,

Sammons, P., Harris, A., & Hopkins, D. (2006). were specific and identified four core practices

such as setting direction (identifying and articulating a vision, fostering the acceptance of group

goals); developing people (providing individualized support); redesigning the organization

(strengthening cultures, modifying organizational structures, and building collaborative

processes); and managing the teaching program/operations (monitoring and buffering staff from distractions from their core work) (Leithwood et al..2006).

Daresh and Playko (1992) described principals as managers who must develop the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively manage a school. Some skills are learned through formal training while others are learned through on-the-job training.

The School Principal

Over the last one hundred years the principal's roles and responsibilities have changed. Historically, prior to the position of principal, there was the position of a regular teacher and a head teacher. These two positions eventually evolved into the position of the principal and became the norm as early as 1860 (Grady, 1990). The literature relating to the roles of the school principal has best been described by Beck & Murphy (1993). Their descriptions utilized metaphors to explain the roles of the principal during various decades, but the transition to a new decade did not mean that previous roles and job functions disappeared.

History of School Principal's Roles

Starting in the 1920s, Beck and Murphy described the principal's roles evolving, growing and adjusting along a continuum to include responsibilities from a values broker, scientific manager, democratic leader, and bureaucratic executive and humanistic facilitator to an instructional leader. Beck and Murphy concluded their analysis in the 1990s by describing the principal as the "Community Connector". This metaphor was used to symbolize the growing importance of family and communities influence on educational decision making and the general changing social dynamics in society.

Daresh and Playko (1992) described principals as managers who must develop the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively manage a school. Some skills are learned through

formal training while others were learned through on-the-job training. Ferrandino (2000),

building on the earlier work of Daresh and Playko (1992) who described principals as managers;

expanded the description of the school principal to include such roles as fundraiser, psychologist,

community activist, teacher, marketer and Internet expert. Confirming this notion of a jack-of

all-trade, Sherman (2000) tells us the principal ship calls for a staggering range of roles both

lowly and lofty. He writes, "In one morning, you might deal with a broken window and a broken

home; a bruised knee and a bruised ego; a rusty pipe and a rusty teacher" (p. 2). Thompson

(2001) agreed with this description and highlighted principals as problem solvers, effective

communicators, and supportive leaders of all stakeholders. Finally, Fullan (2006) noted that

principals were cultivators of relationships. He writes, "Schools are complex adaptive systems

that undergo self-organization during educational change" (p. 154).

The Principal's Role Within the School. In Wolcott's (1984) study, principals were

constantly reminded of their status within the professional hierarchy. Principals were expected to

uphold all policies and directives and comply with all decisions made by superiors. Ultimatums,

which were commonly handed down were expected to be followed. Various studies show that

the principals' attempts to successfully identify and work within the environment of their schools

were dependent on their leadership styles (Anderson, 1991; Blase, 1990; Blase & Anderson,

1995; Scribner, Hager, & Warne, 2002) and that a principal's ability to meet goals and

successfully cope with disruptive internal and external forces, while upholding the organization's

mission, is a challenge within micro politics of education (Hoy & Hannum, 1997).

The Principal's Role in School Consolidations. Under normal conditions, educational

leaders must operate in a complex political world that places a premium on skills and strategies

involving consensus building, negotiations, and reciprocity (Portz, Stein, & Jones, 1999).

Intergroup relations research has established that social identity is a critical determinant in the success of a business merger (Shin, 2003; Terry & O'Brien, 2001; Terry & Callan, 1998). Research on mergers in the educational setting completed by Boen, Vanbeselaere, Hollants, and Feys, (2005) and Verhoeven et al., (2002) show that teachers were not only dissatisfied with the merger even years after its implementation, but most of them identified less strongly with their new merged organization than with their former department. This would indicate that symbolic leadership would be a key trait needed by leaders managing a consolidation.

Consolidations, because of the extreme change, uncertainty, and turmoil they cause to organizations and their constituents have focused additional attention to leadership practice. Researchers have concluded that the neglect and mismanagement of human relationships (both internal and external) are increasingly recognized as the primary reason for the disappointing outcomes of many consolidations or mergers to date (Cartwright, S., Tytherleigh, M., & Robertson, S. (2007). Other research has suggested that cultural incompatibility or the inability to adjust to different organizational cultures is the biggest reason for not reaching projected performance levels (Appelbaum et al., 2007).

The consolidation phenomenon can generally be broken into three phases, the pre-consolidation phase, the consolidation phase and the post consolidation phase. Each of these phases may present different challenges, and therefore may require increased focus on particular leadership practices during each phase.

Principals' Dealing with Change/Uncertainty

For teachers and staff, a school closing may involve legal and/or collective bargaining issues, and it is likely to be a time consuming, challenging, and complicated process (Steiner, 2009). For example, in a study among teachers of merging colleges in the Netherlands,

Verhoeven (2002), observed that most of the teachers were dissatisfied with the merger even years after the merger had been implemented. In line with this reasoning, research in the context of corporate mergers showed that members of low status merger partners have been observed to be less identified with the post-merger organization, less satisfied with their job as well as more engaged in in-group bias than high status group members (Terry & Callan, 1998; Terry & O'Brien, 2001). For the staff, consolidation or the threat of consolidation, may lead to teacher stress and turnover due to related fears and uncertainties (Kyriacou & Harriman, 1993; McHugh & Kyle, 1993). Teachers may suffer loss of confidence, be tempted to take time off work, and rely more heavily on support networks (Kyriacou & Harriman, 1993).

Leadership and Unpredictable Times

Scholars have suggested that when substantial organizational change takes place, members will often go through a process of "sense making" as they attempt to construct their identities in dynamic and turbulent contexts associated with significant change (Fiol, 1991; Maitlis, 2005; Weick, 1995). Sense making allows people to rationalize situations in order to deal with uncertainty and ambiguity and to take action (Maitlis, 2005).

Pre-consolidation. In the early stages of the pre-consolidation, leaders need to be mindful of avoiding merger syndrome. Merger syndrome is described by Marks & Mirvis (1997) as occurring when communication begins to decrease and becomes more centralized resulting in increased rumors and distrust (Daniel, 1999, & DeVoge & Shiraki, 2000). This can lead to resistance and trying to maintain the status quo (Marks & Mirvis, 1985). Employees' productivity may also be negatively affected due to a lack of knowledge about the long-term vision of the organization and the impact of the consolidation on them Smye & Grant (1989), Bartels, J, Douwes, R., de Jong, M., & Pruyn, A. (2006) and Van Dick, Ullrich, and Tissington

(2006) have commented that mergers may present a threat to employees' stability within the organization, the continuity of employee identity, and contributed to concerns of job insecurity.

The literature seems to indicate that leadership communication is critical for the success of a consolidation. It is also one of the key components in combining organizational cultures (Balmer & Dinnie, 1996). Davy, Kinicki, Kilroy, and Scheck (1988) have suggested that for communication to be effective prior to a consolidation, it should be timely, comprehensive, and should be repeated in many media formats and outlets because not all forms of communication have the same effect.

Appelbaum, Gandell, Yortis, Proper, and Jobin (2000) have concluded that true communication is difficult to achieve prior to the consolidation because of numerous obstacles, such as the amount of uncertainty and speculation that exists following the announcement of the consolidation. Communication must be considered credible by employees and the rationale for organizational changes must be communicated by the leadership to ensure that organizational culture is addressed.

One of the key steps in the pre-consolidation merger phase is to decide which model of organizational culture will best suit the new organization and it is important that senior leaders and the human resource departments map out plans for culture amalgamation (Tetenbaum, 1999). This may mean choosing one of the existing cultures, creating a culture that takes the best of both cultures, or building a completely new culture (Appelbaum et al., 2000).

During a Consolidation. Scholars have identified the consolidation period itself as critical when combining two sets of personnel and identifying those employees who will stay and those that will leave the organization (Daniel, 1999; Marks & Mirvis, 1997; Smye & Grant, 1989). Doing this quickly allows employees to know where they stand in the organization.

Human Resources play a critical counseling role with employees in this time of transition (Smye & Grant, 1989).

Bridges (1991, 2001) has noted that the best way to deal with the transition process is to bring any real or perceived losses felt by staff out into the open because ignoring situations only results in heightened frustration and attention. During the consolidation process Booz, Hamilton and Hamilton (2001) suggest that leadership should follow four key principles: communicate a shared vision; seize defining moments to make explicit choices and trade-offs; simultaneously execute against competing critical imperatives; and employ a rigorous integrated planning process.

Post-consolidation. After the consolidation is formalized legally and physically, the process moves into the post-consolidation phase. The post consolidation phase contains the most extensive amount of research. There is literature that deals with post consolidation performance (Daly, Pouder, & Kabanoff, 2004), surviving a post-consolidation culture clash (Bligh, 2006), establishing an employment relationship after the consolidation (Linde & Schalk, 2006), sense making in management team meetings (Rovio-Johansson, 2007), creativity after mergers (Zhou, Shin, & Cannella, 2008), dealing with people's uncertainty (Davy, Kinicki, Kilroy, & Scheck, 1988), stress and communication (Lotz & Donald, 2006), employee feedback and performance appraisals (Miller & Medved, 2000), organizational identity (Kovoor-Misra & Smith, 2008) and leadership, work outcomes, and openness to change (Hinduan,Wilson-Evered, Moss, & Scannell, 2009).

After the consolidation is completed, the literature concerning the relationship between consolidations and working conditions found that consolidation may lead to improvements in teacher perceptions of effectiveness. Some teachers claim they grew more professionally after a

consolidation than at any other time in their careers. They gained more tools for teaching, and enjoyed more interaction with other teachers (Self, 2001). So, while there is evidence that teachers may benefit professionally after the school is consolidate, the personal costs prior to and during the consolidation experience may be quite high.

Principals Dealing with Conflict/Tension

New educational leadership voices emerged in the late1980s and early 1990s, like Ronald Heifetz (1994) who sought to infuse school leadership with a moral dimension that is value-laden. He argued that leadership should not be confused with authority and in fact, one of the key impediments to leadership is authority (Ronald Heifetz, 1994). Kathryn A. McDermott (1999) identifies "two principal mistakes" made by advocates who view educational administration as a-political. First, these advocates fail to comprehend that "administrative acts" are also political acts because they require setting priorities and allocating resources. Secondly, they ignore "the fact that asserting professional authority over the lives of laypeople was in itself a political act" (McDermott, 1999, pg. 17-18).

Along this line of thinking, Portz, Stein, and Jones (1999) argue that "As schools increasingly become 'open systems' to their surrounding environment, new actors—business leaders, mayors, social service providers, and others—enter discussions on public education and educational leadership is needed to focus the debate, solicit resources from supporters, appease opponents, and construct a common agenda to guide all parties" (Portz, Stein, and Jones, 1999 p. 33). Maxwell (2009) contended that in an era of high-stakes accountability and intense public scrutiny, there is a widespread consensus that the principal who runs an individual school can make it or break it.

Within the framework of "running the school"; Lyons (1999) identified the greatest

challenges and frustrations faced by principals' as "managing time demands and paperwork" and

"dealing with the bureaucracy, insensitive bureaucrats, red tape, politics, legislative demands and

regulations" (p. 21). Fullan (2001) identified four ways in which he believed that school

leadership is challenging for principals in today's schools. First, changes are deeper and more

involved than in previous years. Second, there are a number of dilemmas in deciding what to do.

Third, one acts differently in different situations or phases of a process; and finally, advice

comes in the form of guidelines for action, not steps to be followed. Finally, Hale and Moorman

(2003) expanded Lyons list of frustrations to include dealing with declining budgets, changing

populations, more extensive accountability mandates, and the ever-expanding list of roles and

responsibilities for principals.

The April 2004 edition of Association for Supervision and Curriculum suggested that

among the core functions of leadership in schools was managing the symbolic resources of the

school. This function entailed promoting the vision, mission, goals, the school's traditions,

climate, and history; and developing human capital by inducting, and mentoring teachers and

administrators. Leaders are also tasked with representing the school in the community, tending to

public relations, buffering and mediating external interests, and advocating for the school's

interests.

The Principal's Responsibility for Ensuring Equity. Recent scholars in the field of

educational administration have critiqued the way in which school administration views itself as

a value-free, objective science. Fenwick W. English (2003) argues that "Grounded in

modernism, the field of educational administration has created school leaders who were focused

on control and order rather than what is in the best interests of students and society" (English,

2003, p. 47). English asserted that school leaders were concentrating on the science of educational administration and ignoring the political context of schooling.

Colleen Larson and Carlos Ovondo (2001) use race politics to assert this point. They note that mainstream educational administrators subscribed to a "difference blind" stance, which meant pretending not to see racial, class, or cultural difference so as to achieve neutral, objective, and nondiscriminatory practices in schools. Larson and Ovondo argue that while the difference-blind logic may well be rooted in good intentions, it tends to silence the often difficult and awkward conversations about the tensions, contradictions, and privileges institutionalized within the school. The school therefore abdicates its responsibility for social justice in favor of a stable status quo: "When we deny that racial, ethnic, class, or gender constructions make a difference in our decisions without any serious examination of our actions or of their outcomes, we fail to take seriously our responsibility to educate all children" (Larson and Ovondo, 2001, p. 73).

Perceptions of Justice in Uncertain Times. An area requiring leadership attention is found in the literature on justice in the consolidation environment. A distinction is made in the justice literature between justice at the individual level and justice at the group level. People are inclined to react either as individuals who experience personal injustice or as group members who experience injustice affecting the in-group as a whole (Ellemers, Wilke, & van Knippenberg, 1993; Tyler, 2001; Tyler & Smith, 1998). At the individual level, there is widespread evidence that justice judgments "are central social judgments that lie at the heart of people's feelings, attitudes, and behaviors in their interactions with others" (Tyler & Smith, 1998, p. 595); and those justice issues strongly influence peoples' well-being (Miller, 2001). In contrast, the effects of group-related justice perceptions are rather unexplored in justice research (Tyler, 2001).

Inclusive Leadership Practices. Frattura and Capper (2007) state that in order to support diverse learners, school leaders who place student needs at the center of their decision-making are perceived as valuing inclusive leadership practices. Eilers and Camacho (2007) and Theoharis (2008) define these inclusive leadership practices as measures that demonstrate a nurturing attitude, maintaining high expectations for all students, treating all students with respect, and supporting school-community relationships Other authors such as Gardiner and Enomoto (2006), highlight practices that supported minority urban students like helping to socialize immigrant students to American schools, providing culturally-relevant instruction, and providing early intervention strategies.

Social Justice Leadership. Building on this tradition of consistency, honesty and integrity, social justice leadership aims to close the gap of access, opportunity and achievement, intentionally transforming a school from a place that oppresses some to a model pursuing equity for all (Theoharis, 2009). He defines social justice leaders as those who "keep at the center of their practice and vision issues of race, class, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and other historically marginalizing factors in the United States" (p. 11). Social justice leadership requires continuous grappling with difficult challenges, advocating for every student, and reflecting upon practices and beliefs (Bogotch, 2000).

Rawls (1999), in defining justice posits two fundamental principles. First, each person has an equal right to liberty that is compatible with the liberty of others. Second, social and economic inequalities work to everyone's disadvantage, while open access and opportunity work to every individual's advantage. While Freire (1993) advocated that the role of education is to help the oppressed liberate themselves from the oppressors, thus giving power to the oppressed and restoring humanity to the oppressor.

When social justice leadership is practiced from a political perspective that advocates for children, is authentic and works for a more just society advocacy is born. As social justice leaders, advocacy leaders' first loyalty is children and the creation of an equitable education and society for them. They are servant leaders (Sergiovanni, 2005) but realize that leadership is enacted in a political arena (Ball, 1987; Bass, 1985).

Principal as Advocate. In metropolitan and urban settings, principals serve large schools that are often densely populated with highly mobile, ethnically diverse, and economically disadvantaged students (Dworkin, Toenjes, Purser, & Sheikh-Hussin, 2000; Weiner, 2003). In these environments, socioeconomic issues often influence the way in which principals lead (Lyman & Villani, 2004: Riehl, 2000).

The purpose of advocacy leadership is to facilitate fundamental change that disrupts the status quo in order to transcend the current way of thinking and way of work in a school, and in the broader community (Anderson, 2009). Advocacy leaders are focused on the interests of others and on promoting policy influence (Malen, 1995).

In these settings, principals acting as student advocates integrated inclusive social justice leadership practices into their daily professional work (Oliva & Anderson, 2006). Frattura and Capper (2007) and Riehl (2000) provide an inclusive social justice leadership lens to examine these situations. They note that the needs of low socioeconomic students are personal and social as well as academic and it is only through inclusive leadership strategies such as advocacy for students that moral obligations to meet student needs are accomplished. In order to be leaders focused on social justice and attentive to democratic practices, principals must perceive the importance of building trusting relationships in their communities through authentic actions (Kochan & Reed, 2006; Sanders & Harvey, 2002).

School Culture, Climate and Trust

Mergers present a situation that differs from a stable operating mode (Yukl, 1981) and creates challenges for leaders in that mergers are complex; and success or failure can be impacted by an "infinite" number of factors (Kavanagh & Ashkansay, 2006). There is certainly reason to believe that in order for leaders to be effective, they may need to lead differently in different situations.

This effort is dependent on the strength of relationships between all of the people who make up a school community. People are the foundation of an organization; but organizational life and community life are different in both quality and kind. In communities, members create social lives with others who have intentions that are similar. In organizations, relationships are constructed for members by others and become codified into a system of hierarchies, roles and role expectations (Sergiovanni, 1994). Hoerr (2006) wrote "Good leaders change organizations; great leaders change people" (p. 7). Leveraging human capital by building a strong school culture is one of the single most effective methods of improving a school.

The culture of a school represents the collective values, norms, and professional structures that provide a school with its individual identity (Hoy, 1990). Sergiovanni (2000) referred to school culture as the normative glue that holds a particular school together and asserted that shared commitments pull people together and create tighter connections among them, and between them and the school. Barth (2003) defined school culture as a collection of behaviors and values that have been accepted by the people within a school as an agreed upon set of behavioral structures within which to work.

Social and Psychological Theories Impacting Consolidations

While a consolidation can have far-reaching effects within the school's community, the primary effect may be on students, teachers, and school administrators, whose daily lives are transformed by working or learning in a new place or by the arrival of dozens of newcomers to an existing school site.

In most organizational settings; at some point, all employees will go through a socialization process that integrates them into the organizational culture. Socialization is the orientation process new or transferred employees experience through observation, sensing, and being verbally provided information about the organization (Johns & Saks, 2005; Robbins & Langton, 2004). When large change occurs in organizations, such as mergers, people lose their ability to identify with the organization, and may question the central and distinctive attributes of the organization (Golden-Biddle & Rio, 1997).

To summarize the impact of mergers and the individual challenges faced by those impacted by the consolidation phenomenon, Seo and Hill (2005) have investigated the impact of consolidations on people by examining six theories, namely: Anxiety Theory, Social Identity Theory, Acculturation Theory, Role Conflict Theory, Job Characteristics Theory, and Organizational Justice Theory.

 Anxiety Theory states that individuals experience a myriad of challenges that cause anxiety, including uncertainty and anticipated negative impact on career and job which can result in low productivity, lack of motivation, and mental and physical illness (Brockner, Grover, Reed, & Dewitt, 1992).

Social Identity Theory suggests that mergers bring on a loss of old identities and a loss of interaction with other organizational members. This can cause a sense of loss, anger, and grief, and can result in denial and refusal to change (Ashford & Mael, 1989).

Acculturation Theory argues that individuals experience difficulty in adjusting to a different culture. The outcome of this can include stress, resistance and inter-organizational tension and conflict, often referred to as culture clash (Berry, 1980).

Role Conflict Theory relates to ambiguous and conflicting roles, which can often result in low productivity and low job satisfaction (Marks & Mirvis, 1992). Job Characteristics Theory points to changes in post-merger job environments and is often associated with reduced job satisfaction and commitment along with absenteeism and turnover (Buono & Bowditch, 1989).

Finally, Organizational Justice Theory addresses the issue of the perceived fair treatment of surviving and displaced employees with potential outcomes of psychological withdrawal and turnover (Cobb, Wooten, & Folger, 1995).

The Group Engagement Model. A theoretical framework addressing the mediating role of identification is provided by the group engagement model (Tyler & Blader, 2003). This identity-based model of justice brings together justice concerns with social identity concerns, claiming that justice is an important predictor of human behavior, because it carries information relevant to social identity. According to this approach, being treated fairly indicates a respectful position within one's group and promotes pride in group membership. Social identification, in turn, influences people's attitudes and behavior.

The Role of Culture in Dealing with Uncertainty

In such unpredictable times, leaders face the daunting task of generating employee acceptance (Michaela & Burke, 2000). As Kouzes and Posner (1987) have suggested, leadership

practice includes the art of mobilizing others to want to struggle for shared aspirations. Dennison (2001) has observed that organizational change includes cultural change and, yet, cultural issues are often ignored. As Johns and Saks (2005) point out, a shared set of values and behavior that makes for a strong culture may be very resistant to change because this strong culture has been appropriate for past success and may not support the new order that may result due to a school consolidation.

The most extensive area of post-consolidation research is focused on culture clash and a phenomenon sometimes referred to as survivor shock (Appelbaum, Lefrancois, Tonna, & Shapiro, 2007; Marks & Mirvis, 1998; McKinnon, Harrison, Chow, & Wu, 2003; Stahl & Mendenhall, 2005). The culture clash that exists in many instances when two different cultures are consolidated often becomes most critical during the post-consolidation stage. At this time the organization must start to offer services to satisfy student, parents and other stakeholder needs. The message from most of the researchers mentioned above is that if cultural integration is not addressed, then the chances for success of the consolidation are greatly reduced or potentially impossible.

Robbins and Langton (2004) define culture as providing stability to employees and a clear understanding of "the way things are done around here." Some scholars have noted that cultural differences can result in conflict, leading to outcomes such as polarization, anxiety, inadequate communication, and ineffectiveness (Lubatkin, Schweiger, & Weber, 1999; Sales & Mirvis, 1984; Schweiger & Goulet, 2005).

Although significant change, such as a merger; can create an unstable organizational environment, scholars seem to agree that leaders play a key role in the development, transformation, and institutional aspects of culture (Jung, 2001; Schein, 1992; Nadler, Thies &

Nadler, 2000). Some have argued that the culture of an organization, and the way employees respond to it, is shaped largely by the practices of the leader (Fishman & Kavanaugh, 1989).

Dennison (2001), puts it most succinctly when he suggests that when trying to create change that will last and be translated into action, culture is an important place to intervene. Although an organizational culture may be very difficult to change due to resistance from employees, it remains one of the key elements in a successful merger implementation strategy.

Intergroup relations research has established that social identity is a critical determinant in the success of a business merger (Shin, 2003; Terry & O'Brien, 2001; Terry & Callan, 1998). Research on mergers in the educational setting completed by Boen et al., (2005) and Verhoeven et al., (2002) show that teachers were not only dissatisfied with the merger even years after its implementation, but most of them identified less strongly with their new merged organization than with their former department. This would indicate that symbolic leadership would be a key trait needed by leaders managing a consolidation.

Principals' Role in Fostering School Climate/Trust

Various researchers such as Kouzes & Posner, 1995; Murphy, 2005; Schein, 2004, have highlighted the importance of building relationships while others note that trust is a necessary part of building these solid relationships (Barnett & McCormick, 2004; Fullan, 2007). Fullan (2007) asserted that the improvement of relationships must be a core strategy for change: as positive relationships develop, trust typically will increase, along with other measures of social capital and social cohesion.

Trust in the school principal and the culture of a school is related "as trust is a component of school climate (Hoy & Sabo, 1998). Bryk and Schneider (2002) conducted a longitudinal study regarding trust and school improvement. Their 10 year study of elementary schools in

Chicago found that, "Trust fosters a set of organizational conditions, some structural and others social-psychological that make it more conducive for individuals to initiate and sustain change"

The principal's role in developing and maintaining trust comes in the form of acknowledging the vulnerabilities of others with whom they work, actively listening to the concerns of those around them, and avoiding arbitrary decisions because trust reduces the sense of risk associated with change. Bryk and Schneider found that:

- Trust among educators lowers their sense of vulnerability as they engage in "the new and uncertain tasks associated with reform."

- Trust "facilitates public problem solving within an organization."

- Trust "undergirds the highly efficient system of social control found in School-based professional community."

- Trust "sustains an ethical imperative....to advance the best interests of children" and thus "constitutes a moral resource for school improvement."   (Bryk & Schneider, 2002, p. 34)

In 1978, Blumberg, Greenfield, and Nason conducted a study of 85 teachers to examine the broad issue of trust in their principals. Blumberg et al. (1978) discovered that teachers' trust in the principal seems to be more related to the expectations that they have for the principal's behavior in professional or administrative relationships, as opposed to the interpersonal behavior of the principal.

Professional role expectations were identified as credibility, fairness, support, professional openness. This study went on to note that the trust behaviors teachers rated most high, but believed principals as having the most difficulty with were credibility and participative decision making. Furthermore, when asked what it meant to "trust the principal" respondents noted that how the principal relates to them professionally is more important than how he runs

the school. Therefore, it would seem that most of the substance found in the trust relationship between teachers and their principal concern the conditions and environment of work rather than the work itself (Blumberg et al., 1978).

In a later study, Hoy & Kupersmith (1984), stated that authentic leadership as an element of developing an atmosphere of trust required principals who displayed a willingness to admit their own mistakes, who do not manipulate teachers and who behave like real people rather than sterile bureaucrats (p. 81).   They observed that an atmosphere of openness and candor promoted trust and confidence not only in the principal's leadership, but created a broader sense of trust in the school organization among faculty; noting that the principal is viewed as a symbol of the organization. (Hoy & Kupersmith, 1984, p. 86)

Hoy and Kupersmith (1984), extend the notion of trust in the principal to cover periods of change in the school/organization. They state that change is facilitated by an atmosphere of trust. They cite the fact that often a major stumbling block to change is the suspicion and fear that some changes have a hidden agenda; and anxieties and doubts are often fueled by mistrust. There is an important distinction that separates effective and ineffective leaders. Effective leaders really care about the people. This distinction also has been described as an ethic of caring, as teachers are supported by leaders who are committed to the professional growth of others (Ehrich, 2000).

Communication and the School Principal

Principals have become increasingly viewed as leaders who work at the center of public schools to strengthen the web of social and professional relations (Scribner, Hager, &Warne, 2002). This means that not only must the principal cultivate relationships by engaging in meaningful conversations and professional development with staff, parent groups and district

personnel; but the building of a strong school requires meaningful social and business connections with the community outside the circle of stakeholders with direct interest in the everyday activities of the school.

This is a shift from the perception of principals being viewed as leaders of organizational hierarchies. Within the micro political landscape, the principal was seen as minimizing external threats to teacher and school autonomy (Scribner, Hager, & Warne, 2002).

Principal as Information Mediator

In research on consolidation by Leithwood & Mascall, (2008); Leithwood et al., (2008); Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, (2005), Mooney & Mausbach, (2008); they note that the role of the principal as the dispenser of timely and accurate information is an important component in the acceptance and success of a school consolidation experience. In his study "The Ten Traits of Highly Effective Principals: From Good to Great Performance" McEwen (2003) found that the ability to communicate effectively was ranked as the most important skill needed by principals. He noted that good principals spend 100% of their work time listening, speaking, reading and writing and must have the ability to teach, present and motivate people in a large group setting. He went on to state that most effective principals were genuine and open people with the capacity to listen, empathize and make connections with teachers, students, parents and community members in meaningful and healing ways.

What leaders do or say, what they communicate, how they communicate, how decisions are arrived at and implemented, all have a symbolic impact on members of their organization. Principals must be able to communicate clearly, effectively and frequently. Marzano (2005) notes that it is important for principals to not only be available to staff, students and parents, but should facilitate communication between teachers and other stakeholders in the school

community. Watkins (2003) notes that at its root the primary job entailed in the principal's leadership is emotional. The principal's moods and actions have a strong impact on staff because these non-verbal means of communication can arouse passion, inspire staff and promote enthusiasm that keep staff committed to the goals of the principal. Conversely Goleman, Boyatzis, and Mckee (2002), note that the leader's moods and actions have the power to poison the emotional climate and culture of the workplace.

The Effect of Consolidations on Principals

Despite the broad implementation of consolidation around the country, relatively little is known about how consolidation has affected the principals who have experienced it. The existing school consolidation literature has primarily focused on debates over financial and community effects. To the extent that the literature examines what happens within schools, it has focused on a debate over optimal school size, educational quality, teacher satisfaction and cultural integration.

My study will provide a critical and expansive description that examines the leadership conflicts involved in the process of consolidating two public schools. It examines how leadership is practiced during the merger of two schools located in a metropolitan area within the same school district. In order to properly address this question it will be necessary to examine some pertinent issues like what challenges do leaders face in times of a merger? How does the institutional context of a school merger shape, facilitate, or constrain leadership practices? What specific leadership practices were evident during the merger experience? And how did leadership practices influence the outcome of the merger experience?

Summary

Despite the dramatic scale and pace of changes in the organization of public education, little is known about the consequences of consolidation. The small literature on the effects of school size on student outcomes has emerged relatively recently, and speaks only obliquely to the pre-1970 consolidation movement. A yet smaller literature addressed to the effects of school quality on student outcomes before 1970 has ignored issues like school size (e.g., Card and Krueger, 1992). Several case studies of consolidation (e.g., Reynolds, 1999) provide valuable historical details related to particular states or districts, but offer few general findings on the consolidation of two schools within one school district into one new school site.

The literature on educational leadership and school change is focused on the role of the leader in making educational reform to increase student achievement. The literature on school consolidation and leadership is very limited, and provides few resources to guide a school leader in managing the consolidation of one school with a second school within the same school district (Duncombe & Yinger, 2001; Irmsher, 1997; Sell, Leistritz & Thompson, 1996; Howley, 1996; Seal & Harmon, 1995).

Chapter Three

Procedures and Methodology

Overview and Organization of Chapter

The purpose of the study is to describe and analyze the experiences of three school principals' who led the consolidation of three metropolitan public schools. I will focus on the principals of the schools that are either dissolved completely or transferred into new organizations.

In this chapter, I establish Interpretivism as the epistemological stance that informs the study; and a descriptive case study as a suitable methodology for analyzing the school principals' experiences during the consolidation of their metropolitan, public schools.

I describe methods for obtaining data; with interviews being the main data source. School district and open source documents will be used to support and provide context to the verbatim transcripts collected from six interviews conducted with the three school principals. The constant comparative method is used for data analysis. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the IRB requirements, and the limitations/ delimitations of the study.

Purpose of the Study

This study describes and analyzes the experiences, responsibilities and negotiations of three school principals when their metropolitan, public school was consolidated into another metropolitan public school. The study presents a portrait of their interpretations of their actions by using a thematic analysis to provide an insider's perspective and understanding of the tensions

and conflicts inherent in each school's consolidation journey. My study is framed around the question how did each principal whose school was consolidated and closed experience the school consolidation process?

The main guiding questions are as follows:

- What were the most prominent conflicts and tensions the participants experienced during the school consolidation process?

- What responsibilities did the principal attend to in the course of implementing the school consolidation process and why?

The phenomena I describe and analyze are the three individual principal's reflections on the decisions that were important and revealing during the course of each school's consolidation. These three principals perspectives may provide insights to future leaders who may find themselves immersed in this or a similar type of merger or consolidation

Framework for the Study

My study describes and analyzes the lived experiences of three school principals and the meaning they made of the phenomenon of school consolidation. The three principals experienced a consolidation in the same school district, while my experience with a school consolidation was in a different school district. The study is informed epistemologically as an interpretivist study. A case study research approach is best suited to understanding school consolidations because it is important to describe and analyze how individuals fulfilling a prescribed role understand and make meaning of their experiences, in order to develop a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of school consolidation.

In describing the lived experiences of three school principals it is evident that each participant will perceive events from their view of reality and deduce meanings and "truths"

within the context of their own reality. In such a situation constructivism/interpretivism is an effective paradigm for this study. The effectiveness of this choice is further supported by the notion that a constructivist/interpretivist researcher believes that the interviewer and interviewee may be considered a single entity and that research findings are thus based on the idea that collaboration and interaction are key ingredients of the experience.

Interpretivism

The interpretivist paradigm is rooted in other philosophical traditions including phenomenology as described by Husserl (1965) and Merleau-Ponty (2004); symbolic interactionism as described by Mead (1934), Blumer (1969) and Stryker (2002) and ethnomethodology as described by Garfinkel (1967).

Interpretivism is "founded on the premise that the social world is complex and that researchers and the subjects of their research define their own meanings within respective social, political and cultural settings (Jones and Wallace, 2005; Purdy and Jones, 2011). Therefore the essence of Interpretivism is to understand the experiences of individuals "rather than the researcher seeking to determine outcomes that can be replicated. Interpretive inquiry is concerned with discerning how individuals make sense of their experiences and actions (Bryman 2012; Coe 2012).

Ontologically, interpretivist researchers believe that the "social world is constructed within individuals subjectivities, interests, emotions and values (Sparkes1992; p.25). That is reality cannot be separated or is different from perception. It is the mind that influences how we interpret events and assigns meaning to the intentions and motivations of individuals. Epistemologically, this leads to the outcome that knowledge is subjective and socially constructed. While from a methodological research standpoint an idiographic methodology that

speaks to the centrality of an individual case or case study best addresses the precepts of Interpretivism.

As an investigative approach, I will use a hermeneutic methodology to explore the experiences of the three principals and focus on the depth and details of the data I collect from this small population with an emphasis on a rich, detailed description about what is heard from the principals and a careful analysis of this data; this is often described as "a thick description and a thick interpretation" (Denzin, 1989; Howell, 2013).

My study is framed around the question how did each principal whose school was consolidated and closed experience the school consolidation process? The phenomenon I will describe and analyze are the actions, behaviors and decisions that each principal reveals as important and revealing during the course of their district's approach to school consolidation (the textural description) and how each principal reacted to these events at the time (the structural description).

Given this definition of the interpretivist perspective, this study will seek to understand the school principal and his/her "lived experience" (Merriam, 1998); using a case study as my methodology. As a researcher who experienced a school consolidation, although 1 am not able to completely separate myself from my own presuppositions, I understood that in order to conduct research from within the constructivist/interpretivist paradigm, it is important that I write about my own experiences, contexts and events that may influence my understanding of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994).

The Case Study: Consolidation in a School District

This study seeks to describe the school consolidation experiences of three school principals' operating in the context of a school consolidation process. School consolidation is

defined as the process of dissolving or reorganizing one or more schools/districts into one new unit. Sell, Leistritz and Thompson (1996) state that it is composed of both dissolution and reorganization activities. Dissolution means the breakdown of one unit that then merges with the second, adjacent unit. Reorganization means the evolution of two or more units into a new organizational unit. The distinction between the two processes is a function of whether or not the unit whose structure changes either dissolves completely or is transferred into a new organization. It is generally understood that the consolidation process leads to the end of one of the two units involved.

This is a case study because my focus is on the experiences of the three individual school principals and their lived experiences as they led their respective metropolitan, public middle school during the time frame of each school's consolidation. I sought to understand how each principal negotiated the school consolidation experience and how he/she made meaning of his/her actions as the leader of a school that was consolidated into another school. The experiences of the three principals are presented as a case study. The study seeks to provide future administrators with an emic perspective which at times leads to tensions, conflicts, successes and challenges inherent in a particular school consolidation journey.

Research Method

Case study research is an approach whose foundational assumptions come from the interpretive paradigm. Schwandt (1994) noted, "Interpretive research is fundamentally concerned with meaning and seeks to understand social members' definition of a situation" (Gephart, 1999, p 5). The goal is to describe meanings as derived from the members' definition of a particular situation. The researcher examines how objective realities are produced (Gephart, 1999). Case

study methodology uses intensive examination or a microscopic approach to a "particular" event, topic, issue or group of people.

My study is interested in capturing narratives of principals' who have experienced a school consolidation. According to Kramp (2004) "the object of narrative inquiry is understanding-the outcome of interpretation- rather than explanation" (p. 104). Narrative inquiry concentrates on the lived experience and the interpretation of that experience by the participant. It is an approach that I did not take because I seek to only describe the experiences of the school principals.

Case study methodology was chosen because it was determined to be the best fit for my study. Case studies investigate contemporary cases for purposes of illumination and understanding (Hays, 2004), and this methodology is appropriate when "a particular individual, program, or event is studied in depth for a period of time" (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001, p. 149). Case studies seek to answer focused questions and allow the researcher to provide rich, thick descriptions of the participants' interpretations of their experiences. According to Stake (1995) there are two purposes of a case study.

The first purpose is to answer questions about the case itself and offer readers illumination and new insights about the people or program under investigation. He refers to this purpose as an intrinsic case study. The second purpose for case study research according to Stake is for theorizing. In this situation the case is used as a device or set of findings to be applied beyond the case being studied. In addition to building theory inductively, a case can also be used to test existing theories to determine if certain theories can be confirmed in real-life contexts (Lapan & Armfield, 2009). This is referred to as an instrumental case study.

In the educational environment, case study research is often done "to present an authentic portrayal of typical program functions using observation, participant dialogue, and other firsthand accounts to illuminate and reflect actual everyday program activities" (Lapan & Armfield, 2009, p. 166). A case study research design reconstructs an event through the process of addressing focused questions with the events occurring within a time frame that generally does not extend beyond a year and can often be as short as six weeks. My case study addressed focused questions concerning a phenomenon that occurred within a one year time frame and thus meets the criteria of an intrinsic case study. The unit of analysis is the three school principals in a school districts employing a pre-planned set of strategies and processes to complete a school consolidation.

Cases

This study involved three school principals and reports descriptions and themes from one school district. It describes the experiences of the leaders mainly through data obtained from two sets of interviews with each school principal. I followed Lincoln and Guba's (1985) case study structure by identifying the problem, describing the context and key issues, and listing the lessons learned. Leedy and Ormond recommend a case study when a "particular individual, program, or event is studied in depth for a defined period of time" (Leedy & Ormond, 2001, p.149). Since my study is an extensive and in-depth description of why and how the phenomenon of school consolidation occurred over the course of a calendar year, I believe a case study approach is appropriate.

Definitions of a Case Study. In selecting the appropriate research approach for my study, Creswell (2007) recommends starting by determining the outcome-what the approach is attempting to accomplish. Based on my research question; how did each principal whose school

was consolidated and closed experience the school consolidation process? My study sought to explain some present circumstance; that is the how and why some phenomenon occurred. The how and why questions are more explanatory, because these questions deal with operational links needing to be traced over time, rather than mere frequencies or incidence (Yin, 2009).

Yin (2009), proposes a twofold definition of the case study. First, the case study is viewed as an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident. Second, the case study is viewed as an inquiry that relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion.

Another influential voice in case study research is Robert E. Stake, who argues that there are five key components found in a case study – issue choice, triangulation, experiential knowledge, contexts and activities. He writes:

> For a research community, case study optimizes understanding by pursuing scholarly research questions. It gains credibility by thoroughly triangulating the descriptions and interpretations not just in a single step but continuously throughout the period of study. For a qualitative research community, case study concentrates on experiential knowledge of the case and close attention to the influence of its social, political and other contexts. For almost any audience, optimizing understanding of the case requires meticulous attention to its activities (Stake, 2005, p.443-444).

Other contemporary researchers (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Yin, 2003), chose to view case studies as a strategy of inquiry, a methodology, or a comprehensive research strategy. From

this description, I view my case study as a form of inquiry dealing with an object of study during the course of an academic year (school consolidations); as well as experience and knowledge (themes) obtained from my inquiry.

Case Study Criteria. I used one case to examine the experience of the three principals of the three schools located in one school district. I used my experiences in another district to complete the consolidation study by drawing contrasts with what I learned from the three principals. The case study method is applicable to my study because it allows for an intensive description and analysis of a phenomenon and is guided by the design methods of Hancock and Algozzine (2006), Yin (2003) and Miles and Huberman (1994). "By looking at a range of similar and contrasting cases, we can understand a single case finding, grounding it by specifying how and where and, if possible, why it carries on as it does; we can strengthen the precision, the validity, and the stability of the findings" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p.29).

Case Study Parameters. This study examined school principals as they navigated a unique set of experiences spanning a period of time from when the principal first became aware of the proposed change to the date of the eventual consolidation. The time frame of the study is one year, however it may exceed one year in certain cases. The study examined the case, from the vantage point of the educational leader; therefore broad generalizations cannot be made to other contexts.

This case study describes and analyzes the approach used by the three schools in one district in completing the consolidation and the responsibilities, experiences, and negotiations of three school principals when their metropolitan, public school was consolidated into another public school. The principals selected for this study worked at the middle school level. The three consolidations depicted in one case relate to schools within one school district identified by me.

My experience as a school leader charged with the consolidation of the middle school I led as an acting principal was used to draw contrasts with the consolidations described in this case study. For this study, I used a case that is multi-bounded.

A Multi-bounded System

A case that is multi-bounded is one defined by the finite nature of the data collection protocols (Creswell, 2007). There is a limit to the number of people involved; the three principals involved in school consolidation experiences were located at three different sites within one district. There is a finite amount of time during which the phenomenon being studied would have occurred. This period is between January 2005 and December 2012. The time frame for each school consolidation case study started when the principal first became aware of the proposed change and ended on the date of the eventual consolidation and/or at the end of the principal's tenure; whichever came first. In the three consolidations the time frame studied was one year.

Criteria for Selection of Participants. Following the model suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994), I considered the following factors in selecting participants for this case study: the location where the research was conducted; the participants who were able to contribute meaningful information during the study and the richness of the experiences the participants provided about the phenomenon being studied. In qualitative research, participants are selected for their capacity to contribute to the understanding of the research question(s). Since this is a specific inquiry into the phenomenon of school consolidation and closure, Creswell (2007) and Patton (1990) suggest the use of purposeful sampling.

The criteria used for selecting participants in this study are three principals of metropolitan, public elementary, middle or high schools that had experienced a school

consolidation between January 2005 and December 2012. Consistent with case study design, the case is time bounded (2005-Present). I limited my study to the school leaders (principal) with primary responsibility for the three school sites being consolidated. The three school leaders were selected because they fulfilled the same role as I did; leading the schools being consolidated, closed and absorbed into another metropolitan, public school within the same school district. The consolidations were intended to be due to; but not limited to reasons of fiscal constraints, demographic decline or academic improvement.

Leedy and Ormrod (2001) recommend the selection of participants who have had experience with the phenomenon being studied. I recruited the selected participants who met the following criteria:

- Participants must have been the school principal during the period when the school was undergoing a consolidation.

- Participants must have been the principal of the school that was closed and disbanded as part of the selected consolidated schools.

- Participants must elect to be in the study.

- The consolidation must involve two or more schools located in an urban town or city.

- The consolidation must have occurred between January 2005 and December 2012.

- Participants may be male or female, of any ethnic background school principals during the period when the school was undergoing a consolidation.

- Participant must have been the school principal of an urban or metropolitan school system.

While I originally strove to select principals from schools with comparable demographics as it related to racial composition, socio-economic diversity using free-reduced lunch status as a

proxy for economic status, and geographic proximity; numerous challenges in recruiting participants led me to select two principals within the same state, but working a considerable distance from my site. The schools were all middle schools with diverse student and staff populations and the consolidations were initiated due to budget constraints and declining student enrollment.

The focus of my study is on the three individual school principals who led the school that was closed and absorbed into another metropolitan, public school within the same school district. I describe the principal's lived experiences as they negotiate and make meaning of events during the time frame of the schools consolidation.

I used my experience (described in chapters one and five) as the principal of a school that was similarly closed and absorbed into another metropolitan public school within the same school district to highlight contrasts with experiences described in the case study. My documents and journals were used to increase the accuracy, explore possible alternative explanations and establish the validity of the data described by the three principals.

Data and Data Collection

Data gathering took place between March and August of 2013. As described earlier, due to difficulties experienced in securing suitable participants willing to participate in the study; data gathering occurred between August 2013 and February 2014. In this case study, evidence was obtained through interviews and document analysis. The interview data was transcribed and analyzed for pertinent themes.

Types of Data

While new forms of qualitative data become available and are described in the literature, Creswell (2009) suggests that all forms may generally be grouped into four basic types:

observations (participant and non-participant), interviews (close-ended and open-ended), document (private and public), and audiovisual materials (photographs, compact disks, and videotapes).

Observations. **O**bservations offer a unique form of generating data (Angrossino, 2005), but there are limits to being able to gain a thick description of a phenomenon in this manner. In my study, since the events depicted in this case study would have occurred sometime in the past, observations would be impractical.

Interviews. While data collection for a case study research may take any form that allows a phenomenon to be understood, in-depth interviews are a common approach as it is not often possible to observe the rich experiential elements of a phenomenon while it is occurring. The interview was the primary data collection instrument used and the interview sources were from the three school principals.

The qualitative interview may be described as "human interaction of the interview producing scientific knowledge" (Kvale, 1996, p. 16). The main point is to describe the meaning of the phenomenon for a small number of individuals who have experienced it. Besides interviewing and self-reflection, Polkinghorne (1989) advocates gathering information from depictions of the experience outside the context of the research projects (Creswell, 2009, p.134).

The interview is the vehicle for a discussion about a topic for which two parties have a mutual interest (Kvale, 1996). In the most general sense, the role of the researcher during the interview process is to assist the participant in explaining the experience and its meaning (Polkinghorne, 2005). The interviewer is both a co-creator of dialogue with the participants and a facilitator of the interview (Smith & Osborne, 2003). Interviewers have the role of interacting

with participants in such a way as to develop rapport, communicate respect, offer empathy, and direct the dialogue to gain concrete descriptions of the phenomenon of study.

Rationale for Using Interviews

Since the events depicted in this case study occurred sometime in the past, the interview is one effective way to recapture feelings and interpretations of events that have occurred. Interviews, consisting of "direct quotations from people about their experiences, opinions, feelings and knowledge" (Patton, 1990, p.10) would be the primary data used in this study.

Individual Interviews. Individual interviews offer more flexibility in terms of gaining in-depth descriptions, allow for probing follow-up questions, avoid the influence of group dynamics and are common data collection methods for qualitative researchers (Wertz, 2005). Additional benefits of using interviews include the degree of control the researcher can maintain over the lines of inquiry and the opportunity to gain access to historical information from participants.

Types of Interviews

Responsive interviewing is an approach that allows a variety of styles "qualitative interviewing is a dynamic and iterative process, not a set of tools to be applied mechanically… Qualitative research is not simply learning about a topic, but also learning what is important to those being studied" (Rubin & Rubin, 2005 p.15).

In research interviewing, discourse analysts focus on how language and discursive practices construct the social world in which humans live; while hermeneutical scholars address the interpretation of meaning. The interview protocol most appropriate in this study is the form of research interview called a semi-structured life world interview. Kvale & Brinkmann (2009; p. 14) define a semi-structured life world interview as "an interview with the purpose of obtaining

descriptions of the life world of the interviewee in order to interpret the meaning of the described phenomena" (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p.3).

Unstructured Interviews and Semi-structured Interviews. In conducting individual interviews, researchers may choose between unstructured interviews or semi-structured interviews. Unstructured interviews consist of open-ended questions that allow the dialogue regarding the phenomenon of interest to take any direction that is needed to get a thick description of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). In contrast, semi-structured interviews may include a structured set of standard questions, open-ended questions and may be followed by probing questions that may be employed to help the interviewer focus the participant to share information about their lived experience as opposed to theories or opinions that reflect on that experience (Wertz, 2005).

The semi structured interview lies between the structured format like a survey and a completely open-ended format more like a conversation. In a less structured format the interview is a mix of more or less structured questions. "Usually, specific information is desired from all the respondents, in which case there is a highly structured section to the interview. But the largest part of the interview is guided by a list of questions or issues to be explored…..This format allows the researcher to respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging world view of the respondent and to new ideas on the topic" (Merriam, 1998, p. 74).

Interview Data

The interview protocol I used emphasized two sets of questions. The first set of questions was semi-structured and all participants were asked the same set of these questions. The second set was much more of a conversational format and included some guiding questions also. As the

researcher, I had two purposes in the interview process; to follow my own line of inquiry, as reflected by my case study and to ask conversational and guiding questions.

During the course of the six interviews I customized some questions for each interviewee because a principal raised a topic related to his/her own experience that I had not considered when I developed my two sets of interview questions. "Asking everyone the same question makes little sense in qualitative interviewing. An interview is a window on a time and a social world experienced one person at a time, one incident at a time" (Rubin & Rubin, p.14).

Interviewee as a Conversational Partner

During the interview process, the school leader (principal) being interviewed was referred to as my conversational partner. The term conversational partner emphasizes the active role of the interviewee in shaping the discussion and in guiding what paths I took as the researcher. The term suggests a congenial and cooperative experience, as both interviewer and interviewee work together to achieve a shared understanding " Keeping in mind that the person being interviewed is a conversational partner reminds the researcher that the direction of the interview is shaped by both the researcher's and the interviewee's concerns" (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p.14).

Rubin & Rubin note that if the partners can direct the conversation to matters that they know about and think are important, the interviews are likely to be of a higher quality. Throughout the rest of this study, the term conversational partner is used interchangeably with interviewee or participants to identify the school principals participating in this study. I am doing this to emphasize the dynamic nature of the interview process and to convey the common experiences shared by all individuals participating in this research study.

Interview Limitations

However, there are also drawbacks to the use of interviews. Not all participants may be articulate enough to explain their experiences (Creswell, 2003). Additionally, post hoc reflections cause the participant to view the experience in a different way from when they first experienced the phenomenon. In my case, I found it challenging to keep one principal focused and bound by topics directly related to events influenced by the consolidation.

Interview protocols

I focused my study mainly on information captured through interviews of the three school principals who were asked to reflect on their leadership strategies and provide insights into new and possibly different roles and responsibilities unique to leadership during a school consolidation.

The first set of interviews was conducted in the offices of each of the three conversational partners. For convenience, all the second interviews were completed via a Skype connection. Two interviews were conducted with each interviewee. The first interview session with each principal lasted about two hours each. The second interview done via Skype with each principal lasted from thirty minutes to one hour each. The conversational partner was audio taped and the data was transcribed into written form by a paid neutral transcriber. Quotations from the transcripts are used to illustrate the perspectives of each participant as this was the most accurate way to express their voice. Short quotes appear using quotation marks, while longer statements are captured using a block format.

I used a semi-structured interview protocol during most of the first interview with each principal and more of a guided interview protocol during the second interview as lines of inquiry

emerged from information received from each principal. This structure allowed me to use a structured set of interview questions with each conversational partner to open the dialogue.

The structured set of interview questions was useful in keeping me on track as data collection preceded. When I asked the structured set of interview questions, I inquired about a list of likely sources of evidence that could support the broad questions. Secondly, a semi-structured or guided interview protocol allowed me to vary the questions and employ follow-up questions to probe for more details as the individual situation demanded.

My role and experiences as a principal who was similarly involved in a school consolidation was used as part of the epilogue and to draw contrasts for discussion in chapter 5.

Interview questions

The interview questions as noted by Yin, (2009) are a set of substantive questions reflecting the researcher's actual line of inquiry. The objective in case study questioning is to collect data about actual human events and behavior, and "….the questions in a case study protocol should distinguish clearly among different types or levels of questions". Yin identifies five levels, listed as follows:

- Level 1: questions asked of specific interviewees. This would mostly be evident during my first interviews with the principals.

- Level 2: questions asked of the individual case (these are the questions in the study protocol to be answered by the researcher during a single case, even when the single case is part of a larger multi-case study). In my study this may be found in both the first and second interviews conducted with each principal.

- Level 3: questions asked of the pattern of findings across multiple cases. I will ask this level of questions during my second interview with each principal.

- Level 4: questions asked of an entire study- for example calling on information beyond the study evidence and including other literature or published data. These questions may be applicable when I am completing the analysis of the cases.

- Level 5: normative questions about policy recommendations going beyond the scope of the study - I may visit this type of questions during my final discussion of emergent themes and possible next steps related to the phenomenon of school consolidation (Yin, 2009 p. 87).

From the five levels of questions identified by Yin, my interview protocol was composed almost entirely of Levels 1, 2 and 3 questions. The focus of my study was to describe the experiences of the principals with the phenomenon of school consolidation. I will use Level 4 and 5 questions minimally.

In the first interview with each principal, the interview questions were the same ones used to interview me that are listed on pages 83-85. These interview questions were slightly modified as a result of feedback received when I used these questions during the course of my interview.

First Interview. As the researcher, I served as a filter through which information was gathered, processed, organized and analyzed. Since I had prior knowledge and experience with the school consolidation phenomenon, care was taken to curtail assumptions about the phenomenon that could adversely influence the course of the study (Marshall and Rossman, 2006). I adopted several procedures to address this concern. One procedure was to be interviewed before the first set of interviews with the three selected principals. This interview was used to refine and check my questions for understanding with a partner drawn from the educational setting. Another precaution I took was to contrast my experience with those of the

three principals later in my study (Chapter Five). I waited to analyze my data until analysis was completed on the six interview transcripts of the selected three principals. Other precautions are outlined in the limitations/delimitations section of this study.

The first set of data collected were interview transcripts from my being interviewed by a selected partner. In this interview I was asked mostly questions I developed from my journal and reflective notes related to the experiences of my school's consolidation. The questions used in this interview which is listed below were refined and used to improve the quality of the interview questions I asked the three other principals during my first round of interviews with each principal selected for this descriptive case study.

The first round of interview questions were mostly structured and semi-structured type of questions. The interview questions were used in developing lines of inquiry used to further probe responses received during the first or second interview with each conversational partner.

At the start of the first interview I began by asking each principal a set of questions dealing with information needed to write a brief biography on the principal. See Appendix A-Demographic/Biographical Survey. I then moved on to more specific questions with my conversational partner dealing with Level 1 and 2 questions.

Yin states that the researcher should concentrate on level 2 questions; but cautions that the researcher should guard against confusing Level 1 with Level 2 questions. He uses the example of a detective working on a case to distinguish between the two levels. "The detective has in mind what the course of events in a crime might have been (Level 2), but the actual questions posed to any witness or suspect (Level 1) do not necessarily betray the detective's thinking. The verbal line of inquiry is different from the mental line of inquiry, and this is the difference between Level 1 and 2 questions" (Yin, 2009, p.87).

I took pains to phrase my questions in an open ended format that allowed the conversational partner a wide latitude with which to frame his/her responses .For example, I asked questions dealing with the role played by the principal during the time of the consolidation, background information on the principal, the context of the school consolidation, and demographic information on the school and district.

Level 1 questions were asked of individual interviewees to follow-up on issues needing clarification or more depth; an intentionally omitted fact, event or explanation; and when I heard some new fact or story that appeared to be relevant to my research. I also asked questions that allowed me to identify documents the principal believed were relevant to the school's consolidation that may shed light on issues discussed during that first interview.

First Interview Questions. Questions used during the first interview session with each participant are listed below:

Background Information on Each Principal

- What is your current position?

- How many years have you been in education?

- What work experiences did you have prior to starting your career in education?

- How long have you been a school principal? In the school you consolidated and closed?

- What and where did you go immediately after the school consolidation was completed?

- Are you still working for the school system in which you experienced the school consolidation? If so, in what capacity are you employed? If not, what has been your professionally experiences since the school consolidation?

Consolidation Questions

- Tell me about school consolidation. What happened? Why did it happen? How long did the consolidation process take?

- Do you know whose interests it was to seek this consolidation? If you know, please share your opinion with me.

- Are you aware of any stakeholders who may have benefited from this consolidation? Similarly are you aware of any stakeholders who did not benefit or were harmed by changes in the existing relationships in each of the consolidating schools?

- Are there any ongoing implications of the school consolidation experience that you are aware of at this time?

Institutional Roles and Responsibilities

- Describe what happened immediately before the consolidation, during the consolidation and after the consolidation?

- Describe what you did as the leader of the school immediately before the consolidation? Why? Did that change over the time frame of the school consolidation? If so, what changed?

- What responsibilities did you attend to in the course of implementing the school consolidation process?

- How did you come to know how to navigate the various responsibilities of a leader in the consolidation of two schools?

- Are you aware of or were you told about some aspect(s) of the school consolidation process that you did you not attend to? If this is the case, would you mind sharing this with me and the context in which these issues may have occurred?

- If there are issues that you may not have been aware of at the time of the consolidation, why do you believe these issues did not get your attention at the time they occurred?

Politics of Consolidation: Navigating Tensions, Using Influence, and Staying Sane

- How did you navigate the various relationships and policies of school consolidation involving the various stakeholders? Especially, the parent communities in each of the two schools involved in the consolidation? The teachers at your school site; teachers at the other consolidating school, and the other school principal involved in the consolidation?

- What were the most prominent conflicts and tensions during the school consolidation process?

- Were there differing implications of the school consolidation experience for different stakeholders impacted by the consolidation? If so, please describe these implications as it relates to the three main stakeholder groups impacted by your consolidation experience.

- Is there anything you know now about school consolidations that you did not know when you experienced the consolidation?

Between the First and Second Interviews. Prior to skyping for the second interview, the taped interviews were transcribed by an outside source and reviewed careful by me. I examined relevant documents related to each principal and school consolidation to determine if document analysis may verify, support, provide additional background information or may be contradictory to the prior responses given by a particular conversational partner.

To obtain these documents, I went on line and found the local newspaper that was the leading news outlet for the county representing the school district. I purchased an online subscription that provided access to the archives of this newspaper that was in circulation at the time of the events depicted in the consolidation. I then proceeded to enter some descriptive

search terms to find articles discussing the events related to the various consolidations. Additionally, I went to the school district's website and searched for documents and meeting minutes of the school board and the collective bargaining agreement that guided some consolidation protocols related to human resources.

On reviewing the verbatim transcripts, I made phone calls to two principals to obtain some simple clarifications on items discussed during the first interview; for example, I found what were determined to be errors in a given timeline of events.

Finally with each principal's approval, I sent an electronic copy of the verbatim transcripts to each of the three principals for them to review and confirm the accuracy or any needed corrections and changes to the transcripts. One principal confirmed by phone that she had indeed reviewed the entire transcript and was satisfied with the transcribed interview. The two other principals indicated that they had made a cursory review of the electronic transcripts and were also satisfied with the contents of each interview transcript.

Second Interview. In completing the second set of interview questions three objectives guided my questioning. First, I probed for clarity and/or addressed topics pertaining to each individual principal's experience that were revealed from my document analysis; secondly, I repeated questions that were not answered or answered incompletely during the first interview. Finally, I explored the pattern of findings across the different principals recounting of events (Level 3 questions). I analyzed these questions after data on all the individual principals had been collected. I followed-up on topics, ideas or concepts to ensure thoroughness in the responses I had received from the first interview related to each case study (Yin, p.88).

To do this, Rubin & Rubin (2005) recommends asking questions to address several different situations from the first interview. In my study these situations included the following:

when ideas may have be mentioned in isolated instances at various points in the first interview, but on rereading the transcripts I observed that these ideas could be related to form a concept; like political tension. I follow up during my second interview to determine if my interpretation was correct and if so how significant was this concept.

Concerning topics related to one or more possible pattern of findings across multiple experiences. Rubin and Rubin (2005) also suggest asking Level 3 questions to explore first; if there are any identified concepts to see if and how two or more concepts may be related to form a theme. In exploring these themes, I sought to clarify what it meant by asking for other examples that fit the criteria; and then I tried to determine how solid the evidence was for identifying this theme.

Documents. By using documents, a researcher is placed at some distance from real people, so that human action and thought are interpreted through representations of reality. For those reasons, documents are an underutilized resource in qualitative research (Hodder, 2003; Prior, 2003; Silverman, 2001). In this study documents were used as supplementary sources of data.

Documents were used as important resources to place events in context and provide better understanding. Documents increase the comprehensiveness and validity of any single study (Patton, 2002), but are distinctive in one respect: unlike interviews and observational episodes, documents exist before the researcher seeks to use them as data. Research using documents involves a post-hoc account of previously generated social data (Hakim, 1987, p. 41).

Researchers who use documents address their distinctive features in three main ways, through: (a) strategies of document selection, (b) consideration of the social exchange of

documents, and (c) consideration of the socially produced nature of documents, i.e., source criticism (Atkinson, Coffey, Delamont, Lofland, & Lofland, 2001).

For a qualitative case study, the process of collecting information involves primarily in-depth interviews, but I further justified a rationale for doing this study by reviewing documents to determine if there was useful information that may provide insights to future school leaders as they navigate similar restructuring processes at the school level.

Documents are excerpts, quotations, or entire passages from organizational and program records, memoranda and correspondence, official publications and reports, personal diaries, and open ended written responses and surveys (Patton, 2002, p. 4). In this study I used information gleaned from document analysis of district union contracts, School Board meeting minutes and newspaper articles to ask an additional set of questions that helped frame each principal's initial reflections on the consolidation experience.

Types of Documents

The choice of documents I examined was based on responses to probing questions I asked the three peer principals during the first interview. I also drew on background knowledge that I was aware of from my own consolidation experience. I asked each principal to list any relevant documents that supported assertions made in the interview; provided background information or context for events related to the consolidation. Finally, I asked if the principal was aware of any district documents, newspaper articles or internet postings related to the consolidation that he/she may have in their possession or are aware of their existence.

Documents Related to the Three Principal's Cases

Since this study dealt with prior consolidations, the three selected principals included in the study had not been directed to keep a personal journal and none was available. I relied on

documents available on the internet like blog postings, articles from newspapers and public district documents like contracts and interviews provided to various public sources by school representatives.

Documents Related to My Consolidation

In Chapters One and Five, I examine my school consolidation experience, using written materials I had collected from articles and various electronic sources from internet searches or documents I created during my consolidation experience. These materials include journals of my thoughts, field notes written as a participant observer and papers I wrote as part of my classwork in educational leadership. "Written materials created by participants-either in direct response to my requests or as documents that were created for other purposes-captures the thoughts, ideas, and meanings of participants. As such, they provide a window into the human mind" (Litchman, 2006 p.148).

Field Notes. Raw field notes are usually descriptions of contexts, actions, and conversations written in as much detail as possible given the constraints of watching and writing in a rapidly changing social environment. They need to include "key words, names, apt phrases to prompt the memory later" (Woods, 1986, p. 44). During and after each interview with a principal I wrote notes capturing any non-verbal communication during the course of the interview that may provide context to the responses received or frame areas needing further clarification or corroborating information.

These raw field notes are converted into research protocols through a process of "filling in" the original notes. Filling in means going through the raw data as soon as possible after leaving the field and making a more complete description based on the raw notes and what is remembered from the setting. Berg (1998) and Clifford (1990) recommend that the raw field

notes should be expanded in enough details that readers can visualize what the observer saw because the power of observation done well is that it allows access to participants' experiences of their worlds.

My Field Notes. As an acting principal who experienced a school consolidation, I am an active participant and observer of events described in chapters one and five of this case study. At the time of my consolidation experience, I used a journal to collect notes that described my role as a first year principal involved in a school consolidation that occurred between October 2008 and June 2009.

Events were recorded as both field notes proper consisting of a chronological log written each day and field note records that involved organizing information in groups or ordered sets different from the chronological order of events. Some notes were written in completed form daily due to their importance being recognized immediately, while in some cases, essential facts were captured and structured in skeletal form; and have been rewritten in detailed and complete form when I determined that some particular event was material to the research study. These notes are the main source of field notes used in this case study to develop interview questions and for triangulation purposes.

After completing all interviews and the transcription of all data from my three conversational partners, I examined my journaling/reflection notes to identify experiences from the interviews and looked for events, incidents, ideas and concepts that shared a common thread. Information gathered from this analysis was used as additional confirmation of similarities between consolidation experiences and to strengthen themes common to all consolidation experiences.

My Use of Field Notes. In addition to the interview transcripts from the three principals, I took notes during the course of each interview session with the school principals to capture nonverbal and implied statements not available as part of the verbal recordings of each interview. This note taking process allowed me to capture the body language, facial expression and other insights that are not captured in the voice recording (Cresswell, 2009). Groenewald, (2004) also states that taking notes during the interview process improved the researcher's ability to collect full data about what is said and what is happening during the interview process, while allowing the researcher to gain the fullest possible description of what is said, seen and heard.

Lens of the Researcher

As a participant observer of a school consolidation experience, I came to my research study with the presumption that consolidations I would be researching would be very similar to those described in the literature and agreeing with my personal experiences of a school consolidation. My first interview data came as a surprise to me as the consolidation I was studying during this interview included a detailed description of how staff would be reassigned as a result of the school consolidation. This contrasted with my experience and expectation as my consolidation did not have a planned process to reassign teachers and other school staff after the consolidation. In my experience, staff placement was a matter that was slowly developed and articulated months into the consolidation experience.

Challenges in Securing Interview Subjects

Data collection started in February of 2013 after completing and receiving IRB approval (see Appendix B). My initial search for participants was targeted to secure principals of public schools in urban districts similar to my school district and in the same region of the state. My search revealed several school districts that had experienced consolidations since 2008. I

identified the schools and researched the names of school principals in charge of twelve schools within a range of two hundred and fifty miles from my school districts. Four of the principals could not be located. I sent out my participant recruitment letter Appendix C by email to the remaining eight participants. After two weeks without a response from one participant,   I proceeded to track down phone contact information. I made numerous phone calls to each potential participant I had identified. No one responded to several messages I left on recorders, nor with two family members and one secretary.

I expanded my search geographically in May, I did speak to a principal in a Northern school district who informed me that his school had simply been closed, with no consolidation process and he would not be a useful candidate for my study. Several other attempts at outreach to locations like Chicago, Philadelphia and New York State and city received no responses.

In June of 2013, I attended the Florida Association of School Administrators (FASA) conference in Tampa, Florida. During a break between sessions, I was engaged in a conversation with the state President of FASA. I asked him about consolidations and expressed the frustrations I was experiencing finding participants. He notified me that he was aware of one or two districts in Florida that had experienced extensive consolidations of schools. He gave me his business card and asked that I contact him after he returned to his home district in about a week.

Contacting the FASA president proved to be another challenge, but after numerous attempts to reach him by email and phone I did get to establish a fleeting relationship with his secretary. I explained my dilemma, and she was able to obtain the name of the district and communicated that information to me on a subsequent phone call I made to the president's office.

In late July I made contact with two principals in the district I had been told about. Both Principals agreed to participate in my study after talking to me on the phone. I drove down to the district and spent two days interviewing the two principals. During the course of my first interview, the principal of the consolidated school who was now serving as an Assistant Principal at another school told me that I needed to speak to his current principal who had also experienced a school consolidation a few years ago.

With the absence of willing participants and the frustrations of the last five months, I quickly jumped at the chance. This principal accepted my interview request and thus I conducted my first round of interviews with three school principals from the same district who had each experienced a school consolidation.

Data Analysis

This study represents the experiences of the three principals (etic) as captured from interview and open source documents. My perspective as the researcher (emic) will be used to draw contrasts between the three school principals' experiences as compared to my own experiences.

Data analysis occurs in Chapter 4 and is used to inform the discussion and contrasts between experiences in Chapter 5. The broad questions in this study are used to identify if any unique features are found in individual consolidations and to examine any commonalties that may exist between the researcher and those of the three peer principals intimately involved with the consolidation experience.

Data Analysis Procedures

The data analysis procedures I used draw on the work of Lincoln and Guba (1985), Dey (1993), Miles and Huberman (1994, 2004), Moustakas (1994), Wertz (1995) and Creswell

(2007); collectively they represent a form of the Constant Comparative Method.

Constant Comparative Method. A constant comparative analysis is used by a researcher to look for statements and signs of behavior that occur over time during the study (Janesick, 1994). Glaser and Strauss (cited in Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 339) describe the constant comparison method as following four distinct stages; comparing incidents applicable to each category, identifying the properties used for grouping, grouping the various categories, and writing a statement describing common threads related to the categories (Miles & Huberman, 2004).

Categorizing Data. Content analysis, or analyzing the content of interviews and observations, is the process of identifying, coding, and categorizing the primary patterns in the data (Patton, 1990). Each category will be assigned rules that will determine if the data bit fits and should be included within the category. The data bits I will use will be a list of significant statements extracted from the verbatim transcripts. Data categorizing will occur after the first round of interviews and prior to the second round of interviews and again after I have completed the second round of interviews.

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), the essential task of categorizing is to bring together into temporary categories those data bits that apparently relate to the same content. The act of categorizing enables us to order and relate classes of events. Several resources are particularly useful to the process of category generation: "inferences from the data, initial or emergent research questions, substantive policy and theoretical issues, imagination, intuition and previous knowledge" (Dey, 1993, p. 100).

Significant Statements. Using data from each of the two interviews of the three school principals, Moustakas (1994) suggests that the researcher go through the interview transcripts,

highlight "significant statements" sentences or quotes that provide an understanding of how the participants experienced the phenomenon. Significant statements are the "meaning units" described by Wertz (2005). The significant statements could consist of a phrase, a paragraph, or just a word; nonetheless, they are all discrete units of meaning.

After identifying the significant statements I engaged in horizonalization of the significant statements. Horizonalization consists of taking the list of significant statements and treating them as statements of equal value. With horizonalization, one must form "no repetitive and no overlapping" statements (Creswell, 2007, p. 159). Moustakas (1994) used the term horizonalization because the boundaries between each significant statement are akin to horizons.

To facilitate the process of horizonalizing the significant statements, I copied and pasted each significant statement from the verbatim transcript and collected related statements in a labeled file. Each principal interviewed was given a distinctive file name. Each page had a tentative title, and each significant statement listed on the titled page was identified by line number and a code name for each principal derived from the interview transcripts. This made it possible to recall which conversational partner made the statement and the context in which the statement was made in the interview process.

Comparing Data – Categories. Following Lincoln and Guba's (1985) description of the process, I collected each principal's first interview transcript electronically and careful read and reread the verbatim transcript. I selected all the significant statements I identified that were made by my conversational partner during the interview process.

Using the electronic copy of the documents, I underlined all significant statements related to the consolidation experience. I highlighted all the underlined statements using different colors to separate groups of statements. I then selected some preliminary rules of inclusion and listed

some preliminary category names to separate the significant statements into groups by color. For example statements related to or implying anxiety was highlighted in the same color and grouped together to represent the significant statements related to that particular topic.

I gave preliminary category names or identifying phrases to the collection of statements on each titled page that were related. I also stated my rationale for inclusion of items on each titled page containing statements highlighted in the same color. The related statements were then copied and pasted on the pages housing related significant statements. Statements that I could not fit into my preselected categories were saved in a file labeled "miscellaneous". Using this framework, I analyzed all the data collected from the three sets of two interviews from each principal.

After carefully reading the verbatim transcripts from each principal's first interview to generate a list of significant statements, I placed significant statements that had similar themes together and noted the clusters of statements (Miles & Huberman, 1994). I compared my list of significant statements and formulated sets of meanings based on the significant statements (Creswell, 2007). After the sets of formulated meanings developed from the significant statements were separated into categories a tentative list of categories was created.

When a particular category was adopted, a comparison is already implied since significant statements have been organized by grouping like items with like items within a category. When categories were not apparent after a review of the data bits (significant statements), I tried to review and modified my established rule(s) of inclusion.

The significant statements within each category were then compared, looking for similarities or differences within the category. From this comparison of categories, I generated an initial list of themes. As events were recorded and classified, they were also compared across

categories. A comparison between the different categories or sub-categories was then used to yield further patterns or variations in the data. After completing this analysis on the first interview transcript, the two remaining verbatim transcripts from the first round of interviews of the three principals were then analyzed by repeating the process of category assignment. I used distinct file names to represent information collected from each case. The constant comparative method was also used for data analysis following the second round of interviews with the three principals.

Themes

The new categories allowed for broader comparisons. It is from this process that themes described in chapter 5 emerged. These themes, based on the *how* of the data and the *why* of the data, are described by Creswell as the structural description of the case, while he identifies the writing of the *why* of the data as the textural description.

The structural description (Creswell, 2007), entailed describing *how* the participants experienced the phenomenon. The structural description provided contextual information regarding the phenomenon that helped describe the experience of the phenomenon more fully. Contextual information was noted when the themes were described. The textural description (Creswell, 2007) consisted of reporting *what* the participants experienced with the phenomenon.

Member Checking

Prior to conducting the second interview, I returned the transcribed interviews electronically to each conversational partner to review and correct for accuracy. One participant elected to receive and review the transcripts. She reported that the details contained in the transcripts were accurate. The other two participants said since the information had been

recorded they felt comfortable with the transcribed documents and merely looked at the transcripts in a cursory fashion.

I seek accuracy, any insensitivity on my part, and new meanings. "Are the facts detailed in the transcripts right? Is the story complete for the purposes of thematic analysis? Will the draft be offensive to someone? Is it really more complex than that?" (Stake, 2010, p. 126). In what ways might the story be more complex? Using respondents to check language-an idea that the researcher is trying "to get it right" (Litchman, 2006) is at the heart of the member checking process.

Second Interview

The second interview with each of the three principals was conducted via Skype and consisted of verifying the accuracy of data collected, asking clarifying questions to responses from the first interview, and probing questions related to the potential themes I had identified when analyzing data from the first round of interviews.

Clarifying Questions. I asked questions to clarify my understanding of information provided during the first interview cycle. These questions were related to the principal's description of events or statements of fact. I asked the following guiding questions:

- If you were asked to provide additional details to what has been stated by you and transcribed; what additional information might you add to the existing narrative?

- Please provide any further information you would wish to share regarding any answers provided in the transcribed interview.

Questions Related to the Identification of Themes. Secondly, I asked questions related to the tentative themes I had developed. I checked for their opinion regarding staff anxiety, the

absence of student voices and concerns in the consolidation narrative and the equity outcomes of each consolidation experience.   I asked the following questions:

- What do you see as the major events warranting detailed descriptions or analysis from your school consolidation experience?

- Are there categories in the list that you are unable to establish a connection or relationship to your consolidation experience? Please identify them for me.

- How has the consolidation experience affected you?

The data collected from this second round of interviews was also transcribed verbatim and analyzed using the constant comparative method as described earlier. Before I complete my final write up in chapter five, I listed some contrasting perspectives I had noted between my experience and that described by the three principals.

My role and experiences as a principal who was similarly involved in a school consolidation is used for comparison purposes in this case study. Most of this comparison will not be started until after completing the interviews and the analysis of the data collected from the three peer principals selected for this case study. Having the researcher describes his/her personal experience with the phenomenon being studied is in line with Moustakas (1994) and Creswell (2007) recommendations related to case study protocol.

Reflexivity. While it will not be possible or necessary to separate my experience completely from the data analysis, I will attempt to distance myself initially to "see" the principals' experiences and by doing more reflective journaling after this analysis to bring the phenomenon close again with the hope of seeing it differently. In this way, I may recognize and embrace my emic perspective and use my own thinking and prior experiences as written in my reflective journals to allow the focus of the data analysis to be on the participants instead of my

own experiences. My experiences as captured in chapters one and five may then be used to further inform common themes and to accentuate contrasts in this case study.

Case Themes

On completing the data analysis of the second round of interviews with my three conversational partners and the write up and analysis of my school consolidation experience depicted in parts of chapters one and five, I wrote a profile of each of the three principals and the context of their consolidation as it related to each theme identified. I then attempted to draw relationships between different themes and write a description across one or more groups of themes.

Presentation of Data/Reporting

In the next Chapter, I began examining the experiences of the three principals with an introduction containing a short background description of the school district, demographic information of the school being closed in the consolidation and a brief biography of the principals being interviewed. Next, I presented interview data from each principal and finally a thematic analysis of the data collected from the two interviews of the three principals and other documents.

As the researcher, I have had my own experiences as the principal of a school involved in a consolidation as described in Chapters One and Five of this dissertation. I used the responses from the interview conducted with me by a partner to answer in detail the same questions that were asked in the first round of interviews of the participating principals as suggested by Creswell (1998).

My interview responses were not analyzed as part of the data collected and analyzed on the other three selected principals. Instead, data from my experience was used to contrast certain data collected from the experiences described by the three principals participating in this study.

IRB Process

In a research study, it is important to obtain the written permission of participants directly involved in the study (Creswell, 2007). Institutional review board approvals were obtained to protect the rights and welfare of my conversational partners. The IRB focused on procedures for (a) obtaining informed consent from prospective study participants and (b) ensuring confidentiality and privacy.

The study entailed minimal to no physical risk or potentially harmful practices. Since the school leader is the unit of analysis of this case study, it was not necessary to seek institutional approval from the school districts depicted anonymously in the case studied.

Protections

To protect all participants, I sent an introductory letter describing the research project, its purpose(s), general guiding questions, what knowledge or experience I have related to the subject to be studied, reasons for selecting the participant and notification that all participants may withdraw from the research project at any time without ramifications. I included an informed consent agreement with my introductory letter. The Informed Consent Agreement may be found in Appendix D.

During the first and second interviews, participants were asked whether they have any questions about the research. The names of all participants have been changed and any information that could be used to identify them has been removed from interview transcriptions. The professional transcriptionist used was an employee of a firm that guaranteed and provided a

confidentiality agreement related to all files in their custody. All hard copy, hand written notes, printed transcripts and other electronic files are stored at my personal residence and locked. I plan on destroying all files in three years if no further research project is designed.

I have attempted to be sensitive to various dimensions of this case study. For example, the cultural context of the study, an appreciation of whom I have the right to speak for and an understanding of the ownership of life stories related to events depicted in the study are issues I consider with care. The notion of "telling the story" or "giving voice" may be presumptive. To assume that the participants have no voice outside of this case study; or that this study may be the only or most appropriate vehicle to bestow a voice to the participants would be presumptive. In fact, this case study conveys the voice of this researcher.

Since all three participants are school principals, and serving in the same school district; there are no concerns about power differentials during the interview process. As a participant – observer, I provide contextual information about my consolidation experience, but bias may be introduced due to a participant observer's selectivity and possible manipulation of events.

Limitations of Study

This case study was limited to two interviews with each of the three school principals selected by me. Since this is a qualitative descriptive case study, the limitation of just having two interviews with each principal may not have provided sufficient opportunities to build trust and thus may have limited the depth and possibly the breadth of interview data I have been able to collect.

My study sought to describe, explain and analyze the lived experiences of this small and purposely selected group of school principals by comparing the principals' experiences with available documents to provide a rich context for the experiences described and to check for

accuracy. Because textual resources are socially produced beyond the control of the researcher, I had to attend to selecting available documents, considering what documents are not available, and conducting some degree of source criticism of the selected documents. Yin (2009) states that these documents due to their nature may be difficult to find due to poor cataloguing; or the deliberate withholding of access for varying reasons.

Unfortunately, the documents selected consisting of newspaper articles and district open source documents from the district's website had to be accepted at face value and used as presented.

The three principals who served as my conversational partners in the interview process did not keep a diary or a journal of events that occurred during their consolidation experience. Therefore, all the information provided to me in the course of the six interviews with the three principals was strictly based on information provided from recall. There was no way to have the interviewees recheck their responses by reference to information they may have collected at the time the events of the consolidations occurred.

For my second interview with each principal I elected to complete this via Skype for convenience and cost reasons. But, I was unable to capture many non-verbal gestures and some comfort and intimacy may have been lost leading to possibly short and formal responses. The notion of engaging with a conversational partner may have been lost conducting the second interview using this format.

Finally, since my story and those of the other three principals are considered to be an insider perspective or emic viewpoint, the absence of even a limited outside (etic) perspective from others who experienced the consolidations like teachers, students and community members would be considered a limitation of the study.

Summary

The methodology used in this study is a descriptive case study of the experiences, responsibilities and negotiations of three principals during the consolidation of their metropolitan public school into another metropolitan public school. The study is grounded epistemologically as an interpretive case study and the phenomenon described are the actions, behaviors and decisions of the principals that were important and revealing during the school consolidation experience.

Qualitative data was gathered using one face–to-face interview and one interview via Skype with each of the three selected principals and one interview conducted by a fellow school principal with me to discuss my school consolidation experience. A variation of the constant comparative method is used to analyze the verbatim interview transcripts. Finally, changes to the study based on principal interviews are described and explained.

Chapter Four

The Journey of One District and Three Schools

Overview and Organization of Chapter

This Chapter describes findings of this case study. I have coded principal's responses to avoid identifying them by name. The chapter provides a historical background of the school district and the district processes in place at the time to manage the consolidations of the three public schools in one school district located in the Southeastern part of the United States. The chapter provides some demographic information on the three schools and a brief biography of the principals who led the schools at the time of each consolidation experience. The data from the interviews of the three principals are compiled and examined for themes relevant to the consolidation experience.

The Chapter ends with an epilogue that chronicles my journey through the consolidation experience and how I may have been influenced by this experience.

A District's Experience

The Evansville School District is a public school district in the Southeast of the United States that is responsible for the administration of education for the county. The district educational board is comprised of a five member elected school board and an elected superintendent of schools who administer a budget in excess of $600Million. The District is comprised of 35 elementary schools, nine middle schools, seven high schools and several

specialized educational centers. The student population is about 40,500, and the number of teachers is about 5,200.

The district's experience with school consolidation may be traced back to 2001 when reports surfaced in the PNJ of January 19, 2001 written by Lisa Osburn stating that the superintendent of schools has trimmed the list of schools to be closed down to six. The superintendent's revision was attributed to meetings he had held with several residents, including members of the Movement for Change and the NAACP. The superintendent noted in his statement that he had also revamped his plan to better address racial balance in central city schools and the impact this turmoil will have on teacher morale, student achievement and testing, and parental involvement. He stated "I'm very concerned, very worried about it" (Osburn, L. 2001).

The County of Evansville

As of the census of 2010, there were 297,619 people, residing in the county that comprised the geographic boundaries of the school district. The racial makeup of the county was 68.9% White, 22.9% African-American, 4.7% Hispanic or Latino of any race, 0.9% Native American, 2.7% Asian, 0.1% Pacific Islanders, 1.3% from other races and 3.2% from two or more races. Considering age distribution; the population consisted of 21.6% under age 8, 13.0% from 18 to 24, 24.2% from 25 to 44, 26.8% from 45-54, and 14.4% who were 65 years of age or older. The median age was 35 years.

The Per Capita Income for the county was $23,773. About 12.7% of families and 16.9% of the population lived below the poverty line, including 26.4% of those under age 18 and 9.2%

of those ages 65 or over (Census 2010 Summary file. (2010). Retrieved February 18, 2014 from

U.S. Census Bureau Web Site: http://factfinder.census.gove/servlet).

The Historical Framework of the District

The district's current experience with school consolidation was summed up in an article

written by Reginald T. Dolan published by the PNJ on Oct 21, 2006 titled "School consolidation

is the best way to improve education for all" (pg. C.1). The driving force behind the school

closures is a "bloated School District with too many aging schools and a stagnant enrollment that

is roughly equal to the student population two decades ago" Yet, since then, five new schools

have been built. In 2005, the Superintendent of schools proposed the sweeping changes as a

means to mothball dilapidated schools in some of the poorest communities.

He notes that the consolidation plan is expected to save the district about $2.5 million a

year. Money that the School District would use to increase desperately needed teacher salaries,

improve school facilities with the equipment and physical resources to help students learn better

and achieve more. The article went on to state that no matter how the board members vote on the

plan, they won't be able to satisfy the wishes and whims of everyone. He writes:

> The worst thing the School Board can do is to do nothing.
>
> Consolidating some of the district's 60 schools is an emotional
>
> hurdle the district must overcome to improve education in EE
>
> County….. Is a healthy start to closing schools in a district that is
>
> operating too many facilities. Schools must be closed and
>
> consolidated to control costs and eliminate waste and people have
>
> to understand that there will be winners and losers in an effort to
>
> save money, increase teacher pay and improve education. Changing

demographic, economic and growth patterns are realities that have

to be accounted for. And the bottom line is the county has way too

many schools. To remain competitive with other school districts and

to improve our own, we cannot continue doing business as usual.

(Dolan, R. 2006)

In the article the author went on to compare the Evansville County School District to a comparable district with 49,779 students with only 38 schools and the Eatonville School District with 43,342 students housed in 60 schools. He concludes his article by stating "The harsh reality is that this consolidation is just the beginning. More schools will need to be closed, and more district lines redrawn. There is going to be animosity and opposition from parents, students and faculty at some or all of the schools affected. Change is inevitable. Few people like it, most people resist it, but we all have to endure it at some time or other" (Dogan, R. 2006).

District Experiences and Processes

Recent studies completed in 2009 show the School District still has 20 percent more facilities than needed at all levels – one extra high school, three extra middle schools and six elementary schools. "In this one closure and consolidation, we've accomplished about two-thirds of that objective" stated Dennis, the district's assistant superintendent of operations.

While this is the district's largest school closure and consolidation project, local school officials are not strangers to this process. Dolan Educational Center and Duquesne elementary school have been closed during the current superintendent's six year tenure. Bayou Highland and Pembroke elementary schools were converted into charter schools. Bates and Monroe elementary schools were merged into Maple elementary school in 2003.

At the time of the 2003 closings, a blueprint for such a major effort did not exist, so school officials were choreographing plans in a fluid process that changed as new challenges arose. That year, a document spelling out details of the move; from teacher assignments, down to which records to shred, how to close out school financial accounts and what to do with leftover cafeteria food was incorporated as part of the bargaining agreement between the school Board and the Teachers Union (Dogan, R. 2006 pg. C.1).

As new challenges arise, the plans change. Every 10 days, principals from each impacted school and department heads met to revise strategies. Closing schools isn't popular, however. Students, parents and teachers at William Wilson High School rallied against the proposal, marched outside School District offices and picketed meetings to protest that school's closure. William Wilson High school parent, Priscilla S. 42, said the plan "wasn't thought out. "I think the whole thing is dumb" she said. Her daughter Caroline S.. a 14 year old freshman, is anxious as well. William Wilson high school teacher Sheila Harris is concerned about going to a school where there are "people I don't know and students I don't know".

District officials fear there "will be trouble" when students from competing schools are put into the same classrooms. They also question if closing schools is a good move, given state mandates for class size reductions.

Union Contract. In 2003, as the Superintendent of Schools proposed the sweeping changes as a means to realize a $2.5 million annual savings in duplicated services; a document spelling out details of the move related to teacher relocations, interview and hiring protocols was incorporated as part of the bargaining agreement between the School Board and the Teachers Union. Over the years, the contract has been updated and modified.

The current 2013-2015 contract ratified in early 2013, stipulated that when schools are consolidated certain articles of the contract would apply. For example, under Article VII.2 Voluntary Transfer Part D, Consolidation of Schools; the contract states the following:

- All teachers in the schools to be consolidated who so desire shall be placed on the consolidated school faculty if allocated positions and programs allow.

- Teachers in the schools to be consolidated, who desire a placement on other than the consolidated faculty, shall be considered along with other voluntary transfer applicants.

- If the consolidation process results in surplus teachers, the involuntary transfer process shall be implemented as specified in Article VII.3.D.

Other articles in the contract provide additional details for dealing with the reduction of teachers at a school site resulting in a surplus of teachers due to a consolidation. Article VII.3 Involuntary Transfer section D states:

Reduction in teachers at a school/facility: When a reduction in the number of teachers in a school is necessary, subsequent to the initial staffing allocations and adjustments at the beginning of the school year, the following procedure shall be used:

- Factors which cause a need for such reduction may include:

    o a decline in student enrollment

    o instructional staffing or program changes

    o budgetary constraints

- The teachers and Association shall be notified in writing that such a reduction is necessary (Including the factors which cause the reduction and the number of teaching positions affected.)

- Each teacher in the affected school will be provided with an up‑to‑date list of vacancies and will be given an opportunity to volunteer for one of the vacant positions. All volunteers will be transferred first, after which involuntary transfers will be made if necessary based on criteria established in Article VII.3.B.

- Annual Contract teachers who are recommended for reappointment shall be provided a list of vacancies available at the time of the recommendation for reappointment.

- If a unit becomes available in a school whose faculty has been reduced, persons who were involuntarily transferred from that school shall be offered the opportunity to return based on District seniority.

Other sections of the contract that address the movement of staff both voluntarily and involuntarily speak to the effects and remedies dealing with a consolidation and movement of staff. For Example; Article VII.3 Involuntary Transfer Section C states:

Facility or school closing:

- When a decision is made to close a facility or school, the District shall give written notice to the Association and teachers in the affected school. The notice shall include the reason(s) the change in status is necessary.

- Each teacher on Continuing, Probationary, Annual or Professional Services Contract in the affected school shall be provided with an Instructional Reassignment Survey Form and will be given an opportunity to volunteer for vacant positions. The filling of vacant positions shall be in order established in Article VII.3.B. Probationary and Annual Contract teachers.

Article VII.3.B. Goes on to state that:

- Probationary and Annual Contract teachers who are recommended for reappointment shall be provided with an Instructional Reassignment Survey at the time of the recommendation for reappointment.

Case Study of the Three Schools in the Evansville School District

In August of 2013, I visited the Evansville School District to interview two principals as part of my research on school closing and consolidation. My initial presumptions were that the two interviews would be independent experiences that would share some commonalities with my experience of school consolidation. It did in many respects, but it differed in one significant respect that frames the data analysis and reporting of my study.

The two interviews morphed into three interviews within this district where the district leadership had implemented some procedural guidelines that served to differentiate school closing and consolidation in this district from similar experiences in districts that did not have guidelines to manage the school consolidation experience.

The next section serves to provide background information on each of the three schools and the principals whose interview responses are used to develop the themes discussed in a later part of this chapter.

School A: William Wilson Middle School – Principal, Mr. Madden. William Wilson Middle School was built in 1967. It is an aging school with limited structural damage and poor athletic facilities. It was comprised of 538 students, 72 percent of whom were eligible for free/reduced-price lunch. Demographically, 43 percent of students were white; 49 percent black; 3 percent Hispanic; 2 percent Asian; 2 percent multiracial and 1percent Indian. The school was located in the middle of a black neighborhood, but drew kids from other white neighborhoods.

There were few disciplinary problems and issues. There were 38 teachers and the school's grade in the 2006 FCAT test administration was a B.

Effective for the 2007-2008 school year, William Wilson Middle School and students from another closed Middle School were transferred to William Wilson High School, which was being converted into a middle school named Batesville Middle School. William Wilson High School's conversion to a middle school was accompanied by the move of five other schools – the most massive school closure and consolidation plan in the Evansville County School District's history.

Mr. Madden, Principal. The last principal of William Wilson Middle School was Mr. Madden. He is between 56 to 65 years of age with 36 -37 years of experience in education. He has a master's degree with hours toward a PhD and is currently the assistant principal in charge of building and grounds at Titus Middle School. He has 14 years of administrative experience in this school district, and has six years of administrative background on a collegiate level. Prior to entering the educational field he had jobs in sales. He entered education at the collegiate level for 17 years as a teacher, vice president for student affairs, assistant basketball coach, head basketball coach, director of minority affairs, and director of student services. He was a principal for four years at William Wilson middle school before his school was consolidated with Whitehurst Middle School. He was assigned to the newly consolidated and converted Batesville middle school as an assistant principal for three years before being transferred to Titus Middle School in the same capacity.

Mr. Madden was proud that his school (William Wilson Middle School) under his leadership moved from a C to a B rated school and felt that level of academic progress should have been considered as a mitigating factor against closing the school.

In describing the closings, Madden noted that "I think the nature of the closings basically, uh, was to save money. Most of us in education in Evansville County knew that over the years, we were operating too many schools. For a, uh, student population between 40 and 50,000 students, we were operating the most schools in the state of Florida. We served, um, anywhere from 42 or 3 or 44,000 students, and there were some school districts that served 38, 39, 36,000 students that had about half the schools that we did" He went on to note that some of the schools in the district were very small schools, with some elementary schools with 215 students and a middle school with 295 students. It had been talked about for quite some time to close some of the smaller schools and the decision was made to consolidate them into one; to save money by not have another physical plant to operate and take care of.

School B: Bryant Middle School – Principal Ms. Kennedy. Bryant Middle was built in 1955 and had been the beneficiary of several upgrades and renovations. The facilities had received an upgraded air conditioning system. The campus had a very large acreage which was considered a plus in promoting activities and sports. There were 765 students, 83 percent of whom were on free/reduced price lunch. 39 percent of the students were white, 56 percent black; 2 percent Hispanic; and 1 percent each of Asian, Indian, and multiracial ancestry. There were 59 teachers and in 2006 FCAT test administration the school had received a grade of B. All of Bryant Middle School will be moved to the new middle school at Batesville.

Ms. Kennedy, Principal. The last principal of the school was Ms. Kennedy who is over 66 years of age. She is currently the principal at Whitehurst Middle School and has been in education for 39 years of which 22 years have been in an administrative capacity, 19 of which have been as a school principal. 13 years as a principal was at Bryant middle school which was closed in 2007. She then assumed the principal ship of her current school Whitehurst middle

school. She has a master's degree in education and some course work towards the specialist degree. Her entire career has been in the field of k-12 education.

School C: Van Buren Middle School – Ms. Garner. Van Buren Middle was another aging facility that was built in 1955. The facilities which sat on a landfill had minor structural and fire damage in one wing. There were 601 students in attendance of which 94 percent receive free/reduced price lunch. Demographically, the school was 22 percent white, 68 percent black; 3 percent Hispanic; 5 percent Asian and 1 percent each of Asian, Indian, and multiracial ethnicity. There were 48 teachers and on the 2006 FCAT test administration the school's grade was a C.

Ms. Garner, Principal. The last principal of the school was Ms. Garner. She is between 56 and 65 years old and has 41 years of educational experience of which 11 years was in the classroom as a teacher and six years in the district office. 25 years has been in administration. During this time she has functioned as the principal of a closed school and principal of a middle school which went through a restructuring process, the first one in this district. This turnaround school model involved the principal re-interviewing and selecting a new staff to address low academic performance. At the end of the current school closing and consolidation at Van Buren middle school, Ms. Garner went to an elementary school of her choice as principal for two years before interviewing and being assigned as the principal at Titus Middle School because middle school is her first love.

Summary of Research Results

After categorizing my interview and other data, certain commonalities were evident and impacted by the consolidation of a school that generated many areas requiring attention and management from both district and school leadership.

I will use the rest of chapter four to describe these areas of commonalities that I have outlined into some major themes – Anxiety related to various stakeholder groups; school culture as related to uncertainty and conflict; tensions about traditions versus change; communication by the district and the school principal; principals role in ensuring equity and building trust; and the challenges faced by principals in maintain their personal integrity. Certain sub-themes are discussed under the heading of the major themes.

Macro Politics and Values

An article in the PNJ newspaper written by Debbie Gregory, a teacher at one of the consolidating school dated July 15th 2006, detailed the micro-political factors driving the school district's consolidation plans. She stated the following:

> The district has admitted the closure of the high school would require the
> addition of re-locatable classrooms, perhaps more than 20 of them.
> Each of these portable classrooms costs approximately $65,000, if they are
> new. Classrooms the district already owns cost about $20,000 to move.
> Therefore, these buildings will cost the district between $400,000 and $1.3
> million. The real overload of schools is at the elementary level. Evansville
> County has one-third more elementary schools than comparable districts.
> How does the closure of a high school solve this problem. Furthermore,
> the district states that the maximum population of a high school should be
> 1,800 students. The closure of William Wilson High school would force
> some schools to house more than 2,000 students. Third, while the district's
> plan sells this as an opportunity to give the students at the three middle
> schools newer facilities, the truth is that William Wilson's facilities are

more than 40 years old, and William Wilson High school is only four

years newer than William Wilson middle school. Fallacy No. 4 is that a

new Bryant Middle School already was in the district's five-year facility

plan. Why send them to a 40-year-old school? Is it to avoid spending

money in the inner city? Finally, this plan will put what are now six

middle schools into an area two miles wide and four miles long. Ferry

Pass, Workman, Brentwood and the three combined schools --

Brownsville, Wedgewood and Brown Barge -- would be within a 2 1/2-

mile radius of each other. One of the factors the district's plan employs for

justifying the closure of William Wilson High school is the lack of new

housing construction in the area. Yet in this plan, almost half our middle

school students will be housed in an area the district claims is not growing.

<div align="right">(Gregory, D. 2006 p. C1)</div>

Efficiency

At the announcement of the intent to close and consolidate a school site, it has been

customary for the district to limit admissions and transfers of students into the school. During the

course of the last school year, the student population declines. The literature speaks to the effects

of consolidations on students arriving at a newly consolidated site, Nitta, K., Holley, M., &

Wrobel, S. (2010) from their interviews of students and staff suggest that the students adapted

better than the adults in the new system. Students perceived broader and more diverse

experiences primarily through social integration in their newly merged schools.

Evidence also suggested that students in consolidated schools have an expanded array of

extracurricular activities available to them, primarily in interscholastic sports, although, Nitta,

K., Holley, M., & Wrobel, S. (2008) documented that the effects were greater for moving students than receiving students.

Declining Student Enrollment. Seldom has a school district revealed that poor planning and a miscalculation of district demographic trends was responsible for the closing and/or consolidation of schools. Rather the statement declining enrollment has become synonymous with school consolidations. Mr. Madden outlines a part of the consolidation rationale. He says, "They wouldn't have considered keeping' the school open, and I knew that—the handwriting was on the wall as we begin to talk about consolidating and closing some schools that eventually William Wilson Middle School would be closed because we were a school that, at one time, had over 1000 students. And my last year there, we had about maybe 650, 6—in the 600s. When I first went there, we were around 800, so".

The School's Move at a Glance. The moving blitz is expected to cost between $500,000 and $600,000 and take 25 days to complete.   It's also expected to take about 11,000 boxes, 400 rolls of tape and 20 men with six trucks working eight hours a day for each of those 25 days. Preliminary estimates are that 1,500 pieces of furniture from Bob Brown Middle School alone will be moved to Bill Woodward Middle School. District-wide it is expected to cost another $4.1 million to add 51 modular buildings at six schools where a large influx of students is expected from the closed schools. And that doesn't count all the man-hours it will take to relocate administrative offices, classrooms and entire departments, reconfigure science labs and set up hundreds of computers. Boxes and labels have been distributed, and everyone from janitors to principals is gearing up for the big push. In order to stay on schedule; textbooks, athletic and band equipment and all teachers' supplies from William Wilson High School have to

be packed and shipped to their new locations within 10 days, said the district's assistant superintendent of operations.

William Wilson High School's conversion to a middle school will be accompanied by the move of five other schools - the most massive school closure and consolidation plan in the Evansville County School District's history. "There are closures going on all over the country, but I am not aware of anything this large in the state presently or in the recent past," said Bryan Dennis, the district's assistant superintendent of operations.

Three middle schools will close and two more will be moved as part of a school closure and consolidation plan expected to save the Evansville County School District $2.5 million a year. In addition to the conversion of William Wilson High School to a middle school; Bob Brown, Vance and William Wilson middle schools will close. Bob Brown will move to Bill Woodward Middle. Vance will move to West Harbor Middle School. Current William Wilson high school students will be dispersed to other high schools. Many other schools will open their doors to an influx of students from the closed schools.

Quality

Under the micro-political frame of quality I will discuss student academic needs, and the availability and quality of resources provi9oded to students.

Student Academic Needs. Given the long lead time after general announcements of the closing, the effects of both policy prescriptions and actions by staff impacted the academic programs at the closing/consolidated schools. First, the policy of not enrolling or allowing students to register in the closing school served to slowly erode the number of students required to fully staff the schools. Second, new staff was also not allowed to be placed at the school and finally; some staff anticipating the school closing applied for other open positions during the

school year. This led to an inadequate staffing model. Mr. Madden notes "So that last year, staffing was cut, so I had to do some very creative things to get my master schedule to work cuz I didn't have enough teachers. I didn't have enough reading teachers". He goes on to say that "when it came to one of the key elements in the school—we had a pretty large ESE population, so, uh, the lady who was my crisis intervention specialist— she decided she didn't want to do it anymore. After calling the district ESE director for a replacement Mr. Madden provided this narrative "I run the district ESE department I don't give a damn who you talk to in this district. Nobody's going to give you an ESE crisis intervention specialist this year cuz I said you weren't going to get one, and don't anybody care about William Wilson Middle School cuz we getting ready to close it." Well, the deputy superintendent said I was getting one cuz state law said I had to have one. We didn't get one".

Availability and Quality of Resources. At the start of the school consolidation at William Wilson Middle School there was a student population rate of about 70 percent white, and 30 percent black. There was good parental involvement with a strong PTSA and a strong School Advisory Council. The school pulled kids from three of the really expensive, exclusive neighborhoods in Evansville County. The kids were very sharp and very bright and had a lot of direction with both parents at home. They came from homes costing $3, $4, $600,000,000. But there were a lot of parents who did not feel comfortable with their kids coming into that neighborhood even though they were zoned to come there, and they went through the process to get moved.

William Wilson Middle School was built prior to integration as a black high school. It was built with terrazzo floors in every classroom and every hall. There was a gym, but it was

three-fourths the size of a regular gym, and it didn't have a wood floor; it had concrete floors. No

bleachers. And no air conditioning!

Ms. Kennedy, whose middle school merged into a former high school location, had

logistical problems to address. "All of the equipment from the other two middle schools that

closed got dispersed to other Title One schools. Some of it came with us, and some of it didn't.

I had library books from both schools". The new school had two gyms and two physics labs,

tennis court and a nice football field. It was an improvement in facilities.

Choice

Mr. Madden outlines a part of the consolidation rationale, by postulating:

> "When I first went to William Wilson Middle School, we were around
>
> 800, but I found out by doing some data research through the district that
>
> William Wilson Middle School had 439 kids at Rose Wood Middle
>
> School. Rose Wood Middle School was an A middle school. And, out of
>
> that 439 kids, it wasn't but 12 of them that were black. The majority of
>
> them, through the transfer waiver offers, had been allowed to go there for
>
> childcare reasons. Something like, "I can't be at home to put my child on
>
> the bus—or when they get off the bus in the evening. I have to send them
>
> over to my mother's house or my sister's house—and they live in the RS
>
> district. When we get home at 8:00 or 9:00 at night, we'll go pick the
>
> child up, but, anyway, they had been approving' waivers left and right.
>
> So we—had a lot of white flight at William Wilson Middle School
>
> because of the neighborhood it was in.

Ms. Kennedy had another rationale for the uneven distribution of students noting that some of the parents in William Wilson Middle School neighborhood have had some of the same teachers through two or three generations of kids. They were comfortable and trusted those teachers therefore they were reluctant to move their kids.

Ms. Garner opined that while most of the students impacted by consolidations moved to their new consolidated sites many kids ended up at newly opened schools. When asked where these students went, she said "Like I said different places. They start charter schools. They started uh, private schools. They got parochial schools. Yeah, different types or schools, you know." So inadvertently, the school choice program feed into the process of declining enrollment which would lead to more consolidations.

Student Reassignments. In the process of consolidation and the reassignment of students to new schools Mr. Madden observed that "They took some of the smartest kids in our school and let 'em go somewhere else". This left the teachers who had followed their students to the new consolidated site to work from the worst schedules, the worst planning periods and teaching the lowest-functioning kids in the school. They got the lower-level students. Even the gifted teachers, couldn't use their gifted certification".

Ms. Kennedy described a similar flight of talented students from another closed and consolidated middle school that was supposed to be merged with her school and students at the new consolidated site. "It was a magnet school.—and this magnet school was highly sought after by people in the community for safety reasons. And they did have the highest test scores in our district. They are sitting, with level threes in the 70s, 80 percent—and what they did was they just moved, with those kids that left the gifted and talented program, they never came to us". Ms. Garner made the following observation about her student's consolidation experience:

The school didn't get the capacity that they thought they were

going to get. I don't know where the kids ended up going. I think

they ended up overloading some of the more what they call affluent

school. There are some parents that believe if their child is going to

an all—school with a majority of the students' minority kids that it's

a bad school, and they don't want their kids associated with them.

Or even poor kids—I mean that's reality, that's life, you know. And you

deal with it as a principal, you know. You have parents that probably

took their kids to other schools, private schools or whatever, you know—

to keep from having their kids go to uh—what are considered

Therefore, the net result of the Bryant Middle School consolidation was to consolidate

the gifted and magnet students into one middle school location and left the rest of the closed and

consolidated middle school to consolidate at a new middle school with an even large body of

struggling students.

Equity

Under the macro-political umbrella of equity, I will examine the available facilities and

resources and the communities affected in a consolidation will be examined

Available Facilities and Resources. The available facilities provided to students after

consolidation varied. In Ms. Kennedy's consolidation which involved the new school accepting

two consolidated middle schools it was an improvement in facilities. So those families who

didn't have as much were kind of grateful. She said that the families weren't sure, but they kind

of sensed that maybe there was something in this for them, so that blunted any kind of

community uproar and so forth. That was what I wanted to communicate to them. That it was

better for the kids. There were science rooms so that every science teacher in the school could have a science room. There were multiple rooms that had computer wiring already in it because they had certain vocational classes. So there were some benefits. There was a gym, which the old middle school did not have and a dirt track was replaced by a marked asphalt type track.

Mr. Madden facing a decline in student enrollment and dilapidated facilities would move into a facility with new renovated carpet, lights, painted walls, bookcases. In his words the new school had the number one media center in the state of Florida. They also had the largest cafeteria in the state of Florida. The new facilities would allow the school to go from six lunches for 650 or so students to two lunches for over 1,000 students.

The context of school consolidation provides fertile ground with which to collect evidence on issues of social justice. Alsbury and Shaw (2005) write that when evaluating policies of school district consolidations there are three definitive questions that must be addressed: (a) what is the ultimate purpose of public education for the masses, regardless of background or status?" (b) How is social justice implemented within the school versus within a community with school district consolidation; and (c) "Is social justice in the school or the community more important?"

Harry Brighouse (2009), a philosopher of education, writes that the idea of equity is purposely vague and is an amalgamation of other concepts such as equality and educational achievement. While Mulford and Silins (2003) suggest that ―reforms in schools, no matter how well conceptualized, powerfully sponsored, brilliantly structured, or closely audited are likely to fail in the face of resistance that can come either from those working within the schools or stakeholders outside the organization. Often leaders fail to respond to the voices of their stakeholders, particularly voices that raise concerns of diversity and equity.

A longitudinal study by Cox (2010) examined a decade of results in one county in Tennessee by comparing pre-consolidation data to post-consolidation data including district and student characteristics, academic performance outcomes, and expenditures. The Cox (2010) study found consolidation may be related to this district's change in ethnic representation over time: there was a 5% decline in Caucasian students, the African American population increased by 1.4%, and the Hispanic population percentage increased six fold. The change was coupled with the quadrupling of the number of students with limited English proficiency. The findings conclude that there was also a decrease in overall enrollment in the district with respect to the student population.

The Communities Affected. Alsbury and Shaw (2005) found that the outcome of consolidations for communities was generally negative, especially in communities where schools were closed. The study identified the following negative impacts upon communities: (a) the communities that experienced school closures had a rapid exodus of businesses and residents; (b) a fear that the communities" children, values, and identities of the merged districts or closed schools would be marginalized or become invisible.

Mr. Madden described the dynamics of the two communities impacted by his school closing and consolidation. The net result of this mind set in his opinion was "And so there's a school that just borders to the north of my boundaries that's a white school. With a very small minority population and so the parents knew enough to say, "Oh, well, that's going to be a transportation issue or a child care issue." Despite or because of the districts choice policy the district's response was "Okay, well, you can go there." So what in essence happened was the, the three lowest poverty middle schools were closed, put together, so that I ended up with two of them in one roof. And that's been a challenge, to try to keep the zoned children in our zone".

Mrs. Kennedy concurred with Mr. Madden by noting that when it came to the parents of the gifted and talented students who were mostly white, they knew what they expected of the school. They knew what their kids should get. Those parents actually counted the number of stop lights that the kids had to travel through to get to our school, as opposed to the facility where they had been. They very much wanted their children isolated from the general population. They wanted to make sure they ate at a different time. How were they going to use the library?"

> Ms. Kennedy captures this sentiment in an encounter with a parent.
> "She was a fifth grader going to come to my school, but they were
> moving to Alabama. And she came in, and she wanted the health
> records. She said, "Well, he wasn't going to come to this school
> anyway." And she didn't know who I was. And I said, "Well, why
> is that?" And she said, "Oh, the demographics of this school are
> just horrible." And I said, "Well, ma'am," I said, "You do realize that
> your child's responsible for his learning." That, that doesn't mean that
> just because the demographics of this school are not what you, what you
> think they need to be, that your child's not going to learn, they're
> not going to get a quality education and they're not going to be successful.
> I think that's very unfortunate. They write you off without really
> knowing what your school has to offer". But the perception is, is that
> it's, the, the racial mixture.

Parents of one consolidating middle school were concerned because the three middle schools involved—all three of them were Title One. It was a misconception that all three

populations were going to come together in that facility and that it was going to create major neighborhood gang rivals. That never really happened. The biggest problem they had when the students finally got there was probably with their eighth grade kids; "because they had been at one school for two years".

Ms. Garner summed up her philosophy by saying "if you have a good educational program, wherever it is—that's the key. And I think that reputation's out there. I think it's unfortunate that some people don't choose to take advantage of it and think that the grass is greener elsewhere". She went on to dissect the feelings of the community when I asked how the community took the consolidation "They were okay with it. Park Place is a strange place. I don't know whether it's any different from where you're coming from, but the minority population here, they don't fight for the things they need to fight for. You know, if they had had foresight, I think they would have known they should have fought for the schools".

She noted that her school was one of the schools, which nobody else really wanted to work at, but in the six years there she had seen a remarkable improvement of the students' behavior. The kids were coming from poor areas, which supposed to have been the worst kids, but the teachers and administrators had a relationship with the families. She says, "The people in the community trusted us with their child, so therefore, you know, we didn't have some of the issues that other schools were having. And then the school was within the area where a lot of them walked, you know".

She summed up her feelings by saying "You know, that is something I strongly believe in. Any school that you go to, especially when it's in a neighborhood like this; you fix that school up, so that parents and children can be proud of it. When I came here, it wasn't like this. I did a lot of things to change the—you know, pictures, plants, those kind of things makes a place.

And the analogy I like to use, if I go to a doctor's office, and they got these little rickety chairs, old magazines, as opposed to going into a doctor's office where the floors are clean, flowers are there, you know. I'm going to think that's a better doctor, as opposed to that one there.

A review of the literature by both Wendell Berry (2000) and Diane Ravitch (2010) stress the importance of a community's school in the preparation of children for self-government. Ravitch writes that for over one-hundred years our neighborhood public schools have been places where we have learned about democracy.

Micro Politics of Education

Leadership is fundamentally a moral activity (Shields, 2010; Anderson, 2009). In addition to involving power, leadership involves raising self and others to higher levels of consciousness and as such, it is moral (Blasé, 1991; Burns, 1978). Both leaders and followers awareness of others is increased and individuals expand from a focus on self-interest to prioritizing the group or organization's needs and interests. Others are placed before self, and aspirations, rather than simply meeting goals, is the objective (Bass, 1985).

Principals Dealing with Change and Uncertainty

Under the micro-political framework I will discuss staff anxiety and uncertainty, staff current job motivation, staff job security, staff moving to a new jobsite and staff and principals dealing with Conflict.

Staff Anxiety and Uncertainty. The literature speaks to the central role of anxiety, uncertainty and conflict as often inherent in a school consolidation. While some research suggest some positive opportunities for students, negative perceptions of consolidation initiatives can exist with staff members. Hottovy (2003) recorded staff frustration, as teachers observed the political positioning and negotiating that were occurring.

In the Evansville School District, a set of protocols had been negotiated with the teachers union that set in place procedures to address staff concerns about some of the expected impact of a consolidation. Concerning the protocols, Ms. Kennedy states "They have a policy in place that deals with when a school closes and consolidates what you do with the staff?" She goes on to state that when she met with district officials she wanted to make sure that the staff that she had at Bryant Middle School, which had been a very core group of teachers, would be able to move with her to the new facility. She said "They get three choices, and they could write it on a piece of paper where they would like to go work. So at the end of the year, any vacancies in the district, retirements, anything like that, those teachers were given one of those three choices that they had listed. So it kind of reduced the level of anxiety and fear in your staff".

The anxiety and uncertainty staff experiences as a result of consolidation can often be described from the areas of current job motivation, future job security and the ability to become integrated and connected to the new job site.

Despite the negotiated process that was in place in the district to address staff employment concerns when a consolidation occurs, there was still a level of anxiety and concern among the staff. When Ms. Garner was asked; how did the staff take the news when they first heard it? She replied "Oh, God, they were upset. I had some that cried, some that got upset, you know. Uh, they couldn't understand why they were closing the school. That's a natural reaction, especially for those that had been at a school for ten, fifteen years". She concludes "We didn't have to move absolutely—absolutely anything, so that was a good thing. You know, the most difficult part was the emotional part, like I said."

Current Job Motivation. Mr. Madden states at the start of our conversation that "The morale in the school really went down". He alluded to a disconnect between the academic gains

the school had made from moving from a school grade of C to a B. Somehow, he and his staff believed this should have insulated their school from closure. His feelings are summed up in the following quote "But my teachers—I won't say they didn't work hard, but they were disenchanted. They were frustrated. They loved the school. Some of them had been there for years. They didn't want to leave. They loved that neighborhood. They loved the kids. They drove in and out of it every day. They waved at the parents sitting on the porch when they went out".

Once the consolidation was confirmed, Mr. Madden noted; that he didn't have as many teachers willing to volunteer to do the academic and extra-curricular activities as before. Teacher participation in school activities declined noticeably, and he had to increase his level of visibility to make sure things were getting done. He states "They didn't want to do it. So I had to move around through this—I'm a "move around through the school" person anyway, but I had to move around quite a bit to make sure that everybody was looking in the windows". I asked him "Now, after the consolidation, you think those teachers lost that spirit?" He responded "They did. They lost interest in trying to tutor. We had a fine tutorial program. People that I could depend on to do extra duties and extra things didn't pick it up after the consolidation"

Job Security. Job security was a key area that distinguished the school consolidations having a preplanned process from consolidations that are initiated with decision making as a subsequent set of events. While job security was not a cause of anxiety in the preplanned consolidations, it was a critical factor in unplanned consolidations.

The tenured staffs of the three schools in this district, per the negotiated union contract were certain that they would be placed in a school essentially fulfilling the same job functions they had performed in their prior schools. They even had a choice in the selection of schools to

move to. Mr. Madden noted that staff did not have to interview, and their decision making could be influenced by personal preferences, such as drive time, expected student population, and student academic performance, such as the school grade. Mr. Madden states "Well, we had an opportunity to put down three choices. Your number 1, your number 2, and your number 3 choices of where you wanted to work and the personnel team would try to the best of their ability to accommodate you.". He also noted that many staff members were motivated to move to the same location as their current administrative team. For example, he recalled staff asking him "Well, where are you going?" I had one that said, "Daddy, where are you going'?"

Teachers on annual contract, while not guaranteed a position after the consolidation, were promised the same consideration as tenured staff members Ms. Garner says *"And the first year people, they even placed them, you know, especially if the principal was recommending that they would be rehired the next year, so you know, they treated people fairly. Most people got their first choice as to where they wanted to go. My staff did. That was—that was an easy transition for us, you know".* In my experience, everyone had to interview for their position, except the principal of the newly consolidated school who was appointed. As the principal of the school that was closed, I had to apply and be interviewed like everyone else.

Moving to a New Job Site. The period of post consolidation contains the most extensive amount of research. A quick review of the literature shows there are studies dealing with performance (Daly, Pouder, & Kabanoff, 2004), surviving a culture clash (Bligh, 2006), establishing an employment relationship after the consolidation/merger (Linde & Schalk, 2006), stress and communication (Lotz & Donald, 2006), organizational identity (Kovoor-Misra & Smith, 2008) and leadership, work outcomes, and openness to change (Hinduan,Wilson-Evered, Moss, & Scannell, 2009).

Reassignment to a new school environment was fraught with concerns for staff, students, principals and district officials, Mr. Madden sounded the alarm in stating " Really, we were afraid that we would have, um, trouble with the kids, that they would have sort of like a turf war between them". In fact after the move to the new school Mr. Madden states the following "—to be completely honest with you, the superintendent came over there and said, "Mr. Madden, I need you to do a favor for me. I need you to go to Batesville Middle School and see if you can do something' with school discipline. I'm going to name you—you going to be the administrator in charge of school discipline. I want you to see if you can help straighten the school up over there at Batesville Middle School as a special favor to me."

On another front, an unintended source of anxiety was found in the principal of the school the students and staff were being assigned after their school closed. Mr. Madden paraphrased several teachers as saying "We didn't have any trouble with the kids, and that the kids were—okay, we had trouble with the principal. That was the only trouble that we had. As a faculty, we were easily cohesive". He goes on to say he was told by several teachers that "She tried to drive a wedge in everybody. She made sure there was only one of us on every hallway. She was paranoid, and we'd all came there with the anticipation that we would merge as a school and we would all be treated equally and fairly. We came there with a willingness to work together. We just wanted to make the school work".

This perspective is supported by Ms. Kennedy:

> What, what happened—I'll, I'll tell you what the biggest issue was. Was
> when the principal from the, one of the closed schools, when that principal
> came over and there were teachers from that school that decided to come
> over, whenever they needed something that next year, guess where they

went? And that was more of an issue of, um, alliance or allegiance—

Allegiance of the past. And those made it tough for you to—actually

bring everybody together into one. 'Cause they were so used to that

individual being the principal, and so I suggested to the district—I said,

"Well, maybe that's not the best idea.

Mr. Madden in his own words, alludes to the uneven distribution of teaching assignments says "We had a rough time over there, and—and teachers that had taught eighth-grade math for 25 years all of a sudden teaching' sixth grade low FCAT level 1 students. The teachers that were teaching gifted and honors classes were teaching low level 1 English classes. They weren't used to that, and it was frustrating". He concludes by stating emphatically that "the teachers weren't welcome? It stood out among the teachers. None of the teachers were department heads. They never got any good roles".

Dealing with Conflict. The principals in the district that had a planned process for managing their schools consolidations could not produce evidence of conflict. Ms. Garner captures the community's sentiments. "Like I say, Park Place is a—hey, laidback type place. You know, they just assume that everything is for the best, you know. There wasn't any picketing or going down to the board meeting at that time, demanding why are you closing my school and all this kind of stuff. There wasn't any of that, you know".

When asked about sentiment in the receiving schools she stated that "They already had room. And of course, there's plenty of room at Whitehurst Middle School for everybody. You probably could have put all three of the schools in there".

Mr. Madden states "To be completely honest with you, at my school, we didn't—we didn't really have any conflict. When pressed about the fate of other school stakeholders, Ms.

Kennedy agreed with this assessment noting "that a lot of the issues that would typically have become concerns, the district had a good plan in place. Furthermore she noted that "This wasn't the first closure/consolidation that they had gone through. And so they were experienced with some of the things. And then I was on multiple meetings about how are we going to logistically move everything in trucks? You know. Blah, blah, blah, blah, blah."

In questioning the three principals, it appeared that managing the logistics of a smooth move was an important challenge for each. Ms. Kennedy echoes this sentiment when she says "Yes. Logistics—that was very challenging".

School Culture, Climate and Trust

In this section on culture, climate and trust in the principal I will examine student anxiety and uncertainty and student's social emotional needs

Student Anxiety and Uncertainty. The literature speaks to the effects of consolidations on students arriving at a newly consolidated site, Nitta, K., Holley, M., & Wrobel, S. (2010) from their interviews of students and staff suggest that the students adapted better than the adults in the new system. Students perceived broader and more diverse experiences primarily through social integration in their newly merged schools. But little can be found on the experiences of students during the last year of a school prior to the school closing and being consolidated.

My study inadvertently lead me to deduce that the experience of students at the elementary and middle school levels were articulated mostly through parents, but I learned that the high school experience is different. While this difference is not a subject of my study, I allude to this difference in chapter five.

Student's Social Emotional Needs. While the district and the teachers union had negotiated a document to organize the smooth transfer of staff, no such protocol related to

students could be found. It appears that it was left to the student assignment and school zoning office to redistribute the students as they saw fit and within the guidelines of their regular student assignment protocols. It was left to the teachers in the closing school to discuss the fate of the student body in their school. Mr. Madden writes "we were worried about the students, um, having problems with each other, but that really didn't turn out to be a problem. But he noted that traditions that had been used in their old school were not permitted at their new school. "—we had a dance or two, and we spent a lot of money doing this. The first two years, we spent the night. When we went over to the other school, they were not welcome".

Ms. Garner also offered:

Honestly, when they first came here, uh, I had several of the kids to call

uh, my staff members and myself to let them know they were miserable,

you know, the people just didn't treat them right. They were outsiders,

you know, they felt like outsiders. I think it was more difficult for the kids

than it was for the teachers, you know because you know, if you have a

group of kids that's been used to being treated one way, and then all of a

sudden, they come into an environment where people are not necessarily

treating them the same way, then it's difficult for them. And somewhere

down the line, people forgot the kids, and you know, you usually say kids

are resilient, you know, that they're able to go and they're able to cope,

but those kids had been used to having their own mascot, their own

basketball team, their own cheerleaders, you know, um, it was just certain

things they were used to having for them self. You know, that move does

affect children because like you say, the focus was mostly on adults;

making sure the adults were happy when they were in place.

She continued "Mr. Madden's situation probably was a little different from me because he actually got to go to the same school his kids went to. He went there as an assistant principal, okay, and so the kids still had someone to connect with". Describing her situation she lamented that "Yeah, yeah, but my babies, they didn't have that. And only a few of the teachers wanted to come over here and work. I went out and the kids that were on the bus going to some other school, I'd go out there and tell them about all the wonderful things that awaited them".

Ms. Garner believed very strongly that the consolidation was not in the best interest of her students "It wasn't a good transition for my students coming from that school to this school because they had two different types of principals, okay. My kids were used to someone being there for them. They could come in my office, sit and talk, you know, if they had a problem.

She concluded by noting that with the consolidation, a lot of the children would have to be transported outside their community "And I think in all of this, we do sometimes forget that this does affect the children".

Communication and the School Principal

How leaders effectively communicate with their stakeholders is essential in any setting. The importance of clear, consistent, and continuous communication is often overlooked in the empirical studies on educational administration and related literature on leadership. Earl and Fullan (2003) conducted a case study in Manitoba, Canada that explored principal control over data and the determination of what information was released to stakeholders. They noted that principals often did not understand the need for communicating information to stakeholders.

Organization leaders often falsely assume that employees understand why changes are being made. Therefore it is important that information is communicated by leaders through a variety of communication methods, because not all forms of communication have the same effect. Appelbaum, Gandell, Yortis, Proper, and Jobin (2000) have concluded that true communication is difficult to achieve prior to the consolidation due to the amount of uncertainty and speculation that exists following the announcement of the merger.

Communication is an important theme that emerged in the three consolidations studied. While the schools studied, may have codified what would happen to staff in the union contract, there did not appear to be a strategic plan to manage the notification of principals and the community. This mirrored my experience where there was no established protocols to manage the public relations parts of the consolidation. Mulford and Silins (2003) cited recent research examining effective leadership in schools that were facing challenging contexts. They documented that effective leadership in these schools was tightly coupled around values, purposes, and direction but loosely coupled on involving others in leadership activities, and as a result developed clear-direction and widespread involvement.

The literature on school consolidations place particular emphasis on the importance of leadership communication during a consolidation because it is believed that effective communication is critical for the success of a consolidation. It is also one of the key components needed to integrate two or more organizational cultures (Balmer & Dinnie, 1996).

District Communication with the Principal In this consolidation experience, the press and members of the Evansville school district had made broad statements going back years to the need for the closing/consolidations of some schools over time. There did not appear to be a road map to determine which specific schools would be consolidated at a predetermined time. Events

in the form of budgetary pressures, declines in student populations at certain schools conspired to identify the schools slated for consolidation at a given time in the tenure of the Superintendent and School Board.

Ms. Kennedy was subject to this uncertainty. She states:

> "But the district did not divulge that to the other schools or put it out in the public until around February. I became very, um, concerned because when we were doing all of our, um, individual education plans—that was looming as a huge issue because, you know, not every school does programs the same—so that was a reason it forced them to go ahead and start the process of saying, "This is what's going to happen. This is who's going to be the principal. And they were discussing which schools. They were looking at populations and different things. And then I was notified by the district, that our school, Bill Woodward Middle School was one of the ones that were going to be closed. And then another school was going to move to that facility. Uh, well, we didn't really know that we were going to be, um, consolidated 'til probably the spring of the year that they closed it. Oh, yes. And so I knew probably around Christmas.

Mr. Madden seconds this uncertainty when asked how he had found out about the consolidation. "The district was talking' 'bout it. The school board was talking' 'bout it. It was being' written about in the newspapers, and it had been written about long before I ever arrived at William Wilson Middle School. I would say for ten years, they had been talking' about consolidating and closing' some schools and trying' to do some things to save money". When I

asked when he had received firm confirmation he said "I was notified by the superintendent himself that "We're going to close your school and these are the guidelines. Well, it was like, maybe two years prior to them actually closing the school that we knew".

District Communication with the Community The districts efforts to communicate its strategic plans and intentions may be described as unplanned. Ms. Kennedy describes that the talk of consolidation that engulfed her middle school began with concerns about an existing high school. Ms. Kennedy says:

> Okay. Um, there was a high school that had a very small enrollment. Their enrollment had dropped to about 1,300 kids. And the decision was that they were going to close that high school and disperse the kids into neighboring high schools. When they did that, as a cost-saving measure, they decided they would look at middle schools. There had been a survey that was done, and our county had too many middle schools. When they looked at it and looked at the cost effectiveness running all the middle schools, they decided what they would do is to close and consolidate middle schools and move them to the old high school facility. Originally, they were having, workshops. Uh, they call 'em workshops in the evenings through the School Board and the school system. But the district did not divulge that to the other schools or put it out in the public until around February. So that was a reason it forced them to go ahead and start the process of saying, "This is what's going to happen. This is who's going to be the principal.

She did confirm that after her school consolidation, district officials sought her insights to guide their future consolidation work.   She offered some refinements to deal with logistical matters like the management of inventories and establishing new cost center numbers. From these feedback sessions with her and other school leaders a decision was made to hire 'parent liaisons'. She states "They hired them to be the ones that were, just like you said, to meet the parents and to talk with them and say, "This is what this school is going to be about." You know. They did a lot of that. They—so they learned some things from that because we talked. You know, like I said, we were just kind of in the throes of different things, but they did hire some people in the next round that worked at those specific schools to be community advocates or community workers". She explains the roles and expected responsibilities of a parent liaison "These were parents and community members and others were people already in the school system. They did advertise for those spots, and they hired, I think, two or three to work with the specific schools that were going to be relocated or closed—to transition the kids over there and the parents, to get the parents used to a central person that they would still connect with going through the process".

Communication by the School Principal. In the context of school consolidation, an analysis of the principal's ability to nurture leadership opportunities for teachers is essential in acquiring commitment from teachers (Leithwood & Mascall, 2008). These empirical studies clearly note the importance of effective principal leadership to gain teacher commitment, because teachers have been identified as factors that inhibit teacher and organizational leadership (Mulford & Silins, 2003; Murphy, 2005).

The literature on school consolidation speaks of the role of the school principal as an anchor between the school district and the school community of staff, students and parents but

note that in order for leaders to be effective, they may need to lead differently in different situations. Consolidations present a situation that differs from a stable operating mode (Yukl, 1981) and this instability due to the complexity inherent in consolidations means that for leaders success or failure can be impacted by an "infinite" number of factors (Kavanagh & Ashkansay, 2006).

Consolidations typically occur in the midst of a regular school year and Ms. Kennedy notes "And run the school where I was, I was, to still make sure kids were getting an education. So those were added responsibilities that you had to attend to". Ms. Garner first states that "I knew it was hard for me, and I know how it was to some of them, you do what's best in-in the role as a principal, to try to make sure that you make the transition for anything for your staff as easy as you possibly can, and so that's what I did" She concludes by agreeing with Ms. Kennedy saying " Well, my responsibilities, still it was the regular school year, so I had to do what I had to do, just like I would in a normal school year, but also the added responsibility of being able to work with the district in making sure that you know, certain things were boxed up and all that"

Teachers looked to the principal for guidance and as a source of stability during this time of uncertainty. Mr. Madden notes that his teachers, "the large majority of the teachers felt like they were going to go wherever I went, and when they realized I was going over there, they signed up to come too. I know a lot of them felt like they would be treated fairly if I was over there".

Principals' Communications with Staff Members. Marks & Mirvis (1985, 1997) note that in the early stages of a consolidation, communication is critical and leaders need to be mindful of avoiding merger syndrome. They describe merger syndrome as occurring when communication begins to decrease and becomes more centralized resulting in increased rumors

and distrust. DeVoge & Shiraki, (2000) stress that communication is open, truthful, and as timely as possible in order to dispel rumors and reduce mistrust.

Ms. Garner noted that the staff was upset at receiving the news of the consolidation, but she put the experience into a leadership context by noting the following; "one thing I've always known as a principal, a staff will react the way the principal reacts, okay. And so, although I may have gone home or behind closed door, very upset, didn't like it or whatever, I kept upbeat about the process, that it was something really good for our kids. And uh, you know, that eased the pain a lot I believe, with my staff". District personnel came out and talked to her staff, and continued communicating as events progressed. Meetings were held with the principals, who were getting students from the closed schools etc., they talked about how the moving process was going to take place with the staff, how the staff was going to be reassigned .

The principals relationships with staff members during the last year prior to closing and consolidations involved working with teachers to make a school selection from their three choices. Visit the other two middle schools, meet with their staff, and talk with them about the visions of what the principal hoped to do. Try to coordinate their transitions to the new school, as well as run the school the principal was responsible for managing.

Fullan (2007) asserted that the improvement of relationships must be a core strategy for change: as positive relationships develop, trust typically will increase, along with other measures of social capital and social cohesion.

Ms. Garner summed up her feelings and motivations as follows "I felt like my role as principal, and my reaction as a principal, was going to determine mostly how everyone else reacted. I'm the person out there dealing with the teachers every day. I'm the person dealing with parents that come in, my first task is to make sure that I can make everything—the

transition for my staff and my kids as easy as I possibly can. Although I went home and I just

chewed folks out left and right. But I knew that I had to be positive— this is going to be okay.

That's how you know, it's going to be best for us, and this is going to be good, although I didn't

believe it. I had to ask God to forgive me for lying at that time because I knew a lot of it had to

do with politics, too, you know, but—and in your role as principal, you know what you have to

do in order to make things easier. I mean you just do things naturally. You just do it, yes'.

She concludes by saying "If you go in there as a principal and, "Oh, this old district closing the

School, you know, dog—or what's wrong with them," or whatever, you know. That's not going

to do nothing but makes things worse. I mean you already know they're closing, so why in the

world are you trying to make it worse?"

Principals' Communications with the School Community Although news of school

closings and consolidations was often discussed in the press, and at school Board meetings;

when it came to events at a particular school, the principal could not assume that these outlets

were viable tools of communication with his/her stakeholders. Ms. Kennedy, for example;

recognizing that a consolidation was going to be a challenge for her school due to white flight

says that "I did community meetings, and we scheduled those periodically with parents and

PTAs and different things. Um, we didn't find as much of what had happened with the two other

schools; here there were more children that wanted to do the white flight".

The impact of a consolidation on a school's community that has been reported by

Alsbury and Shaw (2005) included a lingering sense of animosity within the community, and

fear of the marginalization of local values or identity as a result of the consolidation.

In this study, Mr. Madden believes his history of consistent communications with his

parents over time was an asset during the consolidation. He says, "Because I communicated with

the parents ahead of time, and I would call them and say, "Listen, I've done everything I can to help little Billy Bob, but I need some help from you." Some of the parents in that neighborhood have had some of those teachers through two or three generations of kids.

Ms. Kennedy sensing the lack of a relationship between her staff and the families in the new school community, had the transportation department take her staff on a bus ride through all of the new school zone because she had teachers from three different schools that knew nothing about another neighborhood. She says,

> Took us hours, like three or four hours on the bus, but we just kind of
>
> drove the perimeters. We had two buses. We took everybody on the
>
> buses. They were air conditioned, thank goodness. And we rode around,
>
> and we looked at the neighborhoods. 'Cause some people weren't used to
>
> seeing some of the neighborhoods—It was enlightening to them to see that
>
> maybe a road that separates—we would drive down a road, a street, I
>
> should say, we would drive down a street. And on the right side of the
>
> street, you would see the back side of a subdivision with privacy fences all
>
> the way up. And so I, I would tell the teachers. I said, "That's a problem
>
> right there. That's the barrier that our kids can't get over those fences."
>
> You know, it was enlightening for them. For the teachers it was very
>
> good".

Epilogue-How I Started my School Consolidation Experience

As a principal who experienced a school consolidation without the benefit of having procedures and protocols to guide parts of the consolidation process, the experiences of the three

principals examined in this study match many of my own experiences. Below is a short account of some key highlights of my consolidation experience.

Return to Sylvester Middle School

In October, soon after I returned to Sylvester middle school (SMS), a district administrator notified me that a Gifted Center may be placed at the school as an attractor. The rationale was to help increase the student population which stood at about of 600. The district administrator encouraged me to attend the Gifted Conference to burnish my credentials in this Exceptional Student Education Program.

As an acting principal, I suspected that at some point within the next year a decision would be made to make my position permanent or I would have to interview for a permanent position or assignment. I attended the National Association of Gifted Children (NAGC) conference. Within a month of attending the conference, I received tentative word of the impending merger of Sylvester middle school with a back–to-basics school of choice located two miles to the east. The merger of Sylvester middle school was part of a larger consolidation, merger and closure plan involving a total of eleven elementary and middle schools. After dealing with the initial notification to staff described in chapter 1, things remained quiet in the building for the next two days, most staff was still trying to make sense of the news and analyze the implications of this development on their personal lives.

A Meeting of Minds. By the start of December the first meeting of principals involved in the merger of schools was held in in the district offices with a top district official. We discussed setting up transition teams to plan for the merger of schools and naturally many questions were raised. One question caught my attention immediately. Would paid substitute staff be provided for the members of the transition teams to hold meetings? The Principal of the

back-to-basics school quickly responded that he would have no problem with staff coverage, since his staff always takes care of covering each other's classes as they were not bound by the teacher's union contract. This was to be the first of many lectures about the virtues of the back-to-basic school philosophy and culture.

The next day after this exploratory transition meeting, my regional superintendent came to visit Sylvester middle school to set up a meeting to notify families of SMS of the proposed changes. The intent was to conduct a fact finding forum with staff and parents of Sylvester middle school.

Meeting with the Staff. In my consolidation, Sylvester middle school was to be closed and the school of choice; needing more building space was to reopen the following school year on the existing grounds of Sylvester middle school. My staff reported that comments were being made about potential changes and offices the members of the other school would like to occupy. It was clear some of my staff were quite sensitive to this "intrusion". At the formal meeting, all manner of questions were raised, with most being answered vaguely.

The Transition Teams. The selection of the school's transition team hit me with the first full realization of the magnitude of the undertaking. This was not just a school issue, the ethnic distribution of the team as being representative of the school community was important. On the other hand, internal school politics and friendships were also brought into the equation. One of my assistant principals wanted a friend on the transition team. Was this a way to insert a loyalist? I had to deflect these lobbying efforts and chose to select some parent team members.

At the first transition meeting held at the administration building, all the school teams were fully staffed, except the team from Sylvester middle. Unfortunately, one of my parents' arrived 15 min before the end of the meeting. This was a fitting reminder of the vastly differing

demographic composition of the merging schools. In contrast to the school of choice whose

hallmark was strong parental involvement, Sylvester middle school over the years had struggled

with ensuring the active participation of most parents in the life of the school. The seating

arrangement found the teams from the each of the four middle schools sitting together, but the

four middle principals' navigated to a fifth group. In the principal's group, discussion centered

on what would happen to the principals without a school given the realization that four schools

would be downsized into two. Would there be two, one or none of us at the consolidated sites?

We looked across the room at poster stands at each corner of the room. The teams from

each school were working on listing and breaking down their concerns and questions about the

consolidation process into related topics. The idea was to group commonalities between

stakeholder groups and to develop a comprehensive list of questions related to the consolidation

process.

Sadly, at the next general transition meeting held to share answers to those questions, no

firm answers to the teams questions was forthcoming. But at the end of the meeting, out in the

parking lot; the consensus that developed among the transition team representatives was that the

transition meetings were a waste of time. Most team members believed that the process that

would address our future would be handled by the bargaining committee of the Classroom

Teachers Association and the District's bargaining team. The transition meetings were probably

necessary to give the appearance of stakeholder input and consensus.

Preparations at Sylvester Middle School. As I left this second meeting I had a fear that

many of my Hispanic parents living in the surrounding neighborhoods would elect to remain at

Sylvester middle for convenience. They would be making this decision without a clear grasp of

the impact the Back-to Basics orientation of the school would have on the sustainability of their

student remaining at the school long term. I believed that given the socio-economic and demographic orientation of the Back-to Basics community, the district would face a negative public relations environment within six to nine months of the opening of the new program. By this time, I predicted that a large number of SMS students would begin to be dismissed from the program for lack of compliance to the rigid demands placed on the students and or their parents. These dismissals, I felt would be of predominantly Hispanic students. I could just see the perception in the community. It became apparent to me that the best thing I could do to assist my students, parents, the school district and our various stakeholder communities was to organize an extensive educational program.

I strongly believed the only way to avoid short term misunderstandings, but more important, long term distrust would be to ensure that all parties were well informed.

On most Wednesdays at Sylvester middle, a 20 minute homeroom session is included in the schedule. We used this opportunity to give the students a survey on their feelings about the proposed consolidation, and another short survey to take home for parents to determine the most convenient dates and times to schedule our parent meetings.

Ill Winds Blowing from the East. The December Holiday season had provided a respite from the constant highs and lows of the transition and school consolidation process. For me, the calm ended abruptly on the day we returned from the holidays. A trusted teacher came to my office, produced a copy of the local newspaper and directed me to a letter to the editor written by a staff member from Back-To-Basics school. The letter stated that Sylvester middle was a mediocre school with many challenging students and poor teachers, while theirs was essentially a public school that functioned as an elite private school supported by public dollars. Ironically, this teacher was also the multi-cultural liaison at the Back-To-Basics school.

As this newspaper also had an online version, he gave me a print out of numerous blog posts and responses that piggy-backed on her remarks. The major theme in the threads was essentially calling my students a bunch of thugs who did not belong in a highly sought (in the choice process) school representing the highest level of academic achievement in the district.   I sent an email to the principal of the Back-To-Basics school who I had developed a warm and mutually respectful relationship with over the last two months. In the subject line I wrote 'Ill winds blowing from the East'

Preparations Continue. Shortly after the Holidays, flyers announcing an upcoming parent meeting were prepared and distributed to students. In addition to our school produced flyers, the District's office of Special Academic programs sent us a magnet brochure announcing the process our families were to use to gain admission into the Back-To-Basics school under a special grandfathering clause.

A week before the proposed parent meeting, I received a call from the director of the Special Academic programs office to halt distribution of the magnet brochure. It appeared that some important information about the phone registration process was incorrect and other pertinent information had been inadvertently left out. It was clear that the process was being rushed, and several mistakes were being made. I was further instructed to cancel my parent information session and await a series of District organized parent information sessions to ensure uniformity in the message communicated. I protested to the senior district official who replied that he was indeed concerned that equity toward my Hispanic population be carefully considered as we moved forward. I agreed, given that one of my key messages had finally broken through the wall of bureaucratic management.

I decided to shift gears. Looking at the magnet brochure, I recognized that the application process would be challenging for many Hispanic families because all the documents were printed in English. There were no Spanish translations. I contacted the Hispanic Community Center and was directed to the Hispanic Outreach Group. They were enthusiastic about partnering with the school to support the Hispanic population. We spent time discussing ideas and avenues to better integrate and educate the Hispanic families about the Back-To-Basics philosophy, the culture of the school and its educational programs.

A Principal is Selected. My personal status came into focus when a senior district official arrived unexpectedly during one of my Administrative meetings. We stepped outside at which time he told me that the current principal of the Back-To-Basics school had been selected to be the principal of the new consolidated school that would open at my current school site at the start of the next school year. She asked me not to disclose this information to anyone. She went on to state that she and the district appreciated my not asking about my future over the last two months and I should be assured that the District would take care of me. I responded that I could not do the job I had to do if my personal interests were embedded in the larger equation.

Parent Meetings are Held. A week later the first parent workshop was held at Sylvester middle school. We described the application process, and my peer principal described the Back-To-Basics philosophy. The regional superintendent, the director of student assignment and zoning and the personnel director for middle schools attended as observers.

There were about 200 people in attendance with a large group of Hispanic fathers and mothers who were clustered in one section receiving Spanish translations of the proceedings from both district translators and members of the Hispanic Outreach Group. There were several

staff members of the Back-To-Basics school in attendance again. This was quite good as some teachers from both sites got to talk and exchange ideas after the meeting.

Principal Announcement. At the end of January, the principal of the consolidated school was officially announced to quell the rumor mill. The next day, my peer principal came to Sylvester with the regional superintendent to be introduced to my staff. He gave a very good speech about his two kids and two step kids and stated that one could not tell which was his. That is what he hoped for the staff of the consolidated school. He stayed for about five hours meeting with staff and taking a tour of the facilities.

Immediately after the formal announcement of the new principal's name, a constant question I encountered almost daily from superiors, colleagues and parents was what would happen to me after the consolidation. Had I been told? After a few weeks of fielding this question I introduced a new, but soon to become my standard response. As a non-exempt employee I worked on one year contracts that were renewed at the pleasure of the superintendent each year. My mantra became 'I have signed a contract through June 30th; I am not a professional ballplayer and would not be concerned with renegotiating my contract during the season'. It seemed to work.

In my mind though, it was a mixed blessing. Yes, I did want to know what if any plans the district had in mind for me. But, it was better that I did not know for two reasons. First, it would be most unseemly for me the leader to have my work situation settled before that of my staff. How could I effectively lead from a position of strength, with a genuine sense of empathy for my staff if I was not a party to their circumstance? My leadership would not be perceived as sincere and authentic. Secondly, if I knew my position after the consolidation, would I be able to share that information with my staff? If it was positive I could not talk about it happily to staff

and colleagues given the current climate we were working under. If it was perceived as a demotion, it would send a demoralizing message to those wondering how the district planned to reassign them to new work sites. The next best thing would be to keep it a secret; and that would not be representative of ethical leadership.

Meetings, Meetings and More Meetings. The cycle of meetings continued at the district level, some involving just the affected principals moderated by a senior district official; while others involved the seven member transition team from each of the four affected middle schools.

At an auditing meeting held in early March; of the 11 schools being closed or involved in the consolidation process in the district that school year, only five of the building principals thought the meeting agenda important enough to warrant their presence. I wondered why. Was I trying too hard?

Human Resources Meeting at the School. A preliminary meeting was held at the administration building with the directors of the human resources department to plan for school visits by HR personnel to explain personnel procedures and processes for the consolidation. Early on, I felt the meeting was being rushed because there appeared to be too many loose ends.

In mid-February the HR department held its first meeting at Sylvester middle. The consolidation had been announced in mid-November. After opening introductions by me, and a brief over view by the director of the HR department the support and instructional staff were separated for more detailed discussions on how the personnel policies would be implemented for each staffing group. This was necessitated by the different collective bargaining agreements negotiated with each employee group.

As the twenty support staff members moved to a smaller conference room; I thought "where should I be? Stay with the instructional staff in the main library area or go with the support personnel into the conference room?" I had known the groups would be split in this manner, but I must have been caught up in ensuring there were enough seats, the microphone worked and other minutia that I may have lost sight of the big picture. I made a snap decision. All the district leadership at the meeting, with the exception of the HR supervisor in charge of all support staff was staying in the main library with the instructional personnel. The HR supervisor would be the only district official in her session with three union representatives. I went to the support staff HR presentation.

Consolidation Meetings. A consolidation meeting held in early March was billed to be a very important meeting. But was it? I looked at the agenda handed to me as I entered the room; it covered the better part of two pages. All this in an hour and fifteen minutes; I thought? All the closing and consolidating schools were represented by the principals while in some cases both the principal and book keeper was in attendance. The panel comprised the Associate superintendent for facilities and operations who had been designated the district point man to handle the facilities and inventory closing processes for all the schools involved.

In my case for example, directives and processes were communicated concerning the Media center and the weaning of old textbooks and obsolete audio visual equipment had been mostly completed without my knowledge or input. This was a major issue, and I had planned to raise this concern at this meeting with the Associate superintendent for facilities and operations, but another member of my consolidation team had other ideas. Out of the blue, unrelated to the topic at hand, the frustrations boiled over resulting in her decrying the fate of SMS and stating

that the whole consolidation was a racist ploy to disenfranchise the minority communities of SMS. It was no time for more negativity. I kept silent.

The Student Application Process

With the application period concluded, it was clear that the new Back-To-Basics school would open with a population of about 800 students. It appears that the plethora of choice opportunities had provided north county families with the choice selection they had been clamoring for. But I could not help wandering if the district had overshot its mark. The student population goal had been a minimum of 850.

There followed a two week acceptance period for invited applicants to accept their choice selections. Were my parents familiar with this cumbersome process? I called the data management technician (DMT) at the Back-To-Basics school to give me a count of the SMS parents who had completed this final process in securing a seat in their school of choice. Less than 20% of those invited students had made the call to accept the program.

I recognized that access remained a concern in this process. I took out a legal pad and proceeded to draft a letter notifying the SMS parents who had made application that the process was not complete, notwithstanding their initial application and their receipt of an invitation to participate in the program; a final step, a phone acceptance call needed to be made to the program office. I went on to detail the steps needed to complete the acceptance phone call in some coherent fashion.

A list of the remaining applicants who had not called to accept the invitation was given to a grade level clerk to personally call each family. Friday morning, the final day of acceptance, an updated list showed that two parents had still not called. I had my clerk call these two parents a second time. As we met in the hallway later that afternoon she reported to me that both parents

had made the acceptance call. We had achieved the goal of securing a place for 100% of SMS families who had made application. The clerk, a lady in her late fifties to early sixties of Canadian-French descent, turned to me and said "Mr. Effiom, it feels so good to be able to offer such personal service to our families" I agreed and walked away with a sense of satisfaction.

The Teacher Application Process

My peer principal, the newly appointed principal of the Back-To-Basics school emailed me an outline of his proposed process concerning teacher interviews at the start of the second week in March. The email raised some red flags from my perspective, and I thought that before I responded, I should seek the counsel of my two assistant principals. Why was the interview list exclusive to Sylvester middle staff? Should not all teachers in both schools be combined on the same list to be interviewed? The six member interview committee was slanted 4 to 2 in favor of the Back-To-Basics school staff. Two of his teachers were fixed members of the committee, the third member was the PLC leader (Department Head) of the subject area being interviewed for and the final member was an administrator. The Sylvester team would always be comprised of an administrator (the principal or one of the two assistant principals); But which AP? (Both AP's were scheduled to be interviewed for the lone open spot on the new administrative team), and the PLC leader (Department Head) of the subject area being interviewed for.

Fundamentally, I found a six member interview team to large and cumbersome. Four seemed to be the ideal number, with two coming from each school. Why where the two assistant principals at SMS included on the interview list along with the instructional staff? Would the assistant principals of SMS be subjected to an interview process controlled by a majority of teachers from the Back-To-Basics school? The requirement that each staff member produce three years of evaluation appeared to be overkill, the standard requirement being one year.

Additionally; would these evaluations be reviewed by the other teachers on the committee? The document implied as such.

I called my peer principal and expressed my concerns. He agreed with my recommendations and decided to rework the presentation over the weekend. On Monday the revised plan arrived as promised. There were four total interviewers, two from each school comprised of an administrator from each school and one member of the transition team from each school.

The question quickly arose, which administrator would represent Sylvester middle? I had quickly concluded that I would not be on the interview team. I rationalized that I needed to keep the process of staff selection at arm's length because half of my staff had opted not to participate, but more importantly, I had a deep seated feeling that in the final analysis no more than half of those teachers opting into the interview process would be selected as teachers in the new school. Whom would they turn to in their hour of rejection? I needed to be that leader.

My peer principal would not get to have the luxury of sitting out on the interview process. He had to be the designated administrator from his school as he would be the new principal and all selected applicants would be working under his supervision in the 2009-10 school year. The political pressure from the Back-To-Basics school community and its feeder elementary schools was quite intense. The integrity of the Back-To-Basics school philosophy was at stake. Too many new teachers in the program would signal a lack of commitment by the school and the district. Parents were likely to rescind their application.

In the interview process, my peer principal would have to reject a few of his weaker teachers, but continue to work with them for another twelve weeks. But the majority of his staff

would be upbeat and looking forward to a new beginning for their cherished program, but that would have to wait.

After the start and stop process of the previous week, the interviews commenced at the start of the last week in March. As I sat in my office and teachers arrived in thirty minute intervals for their interviews the first traces of tension in me surfaced. It was evident that notifying all selected teachers by the deadline of April 15th would not be feasible. The one week Spring Break was just a week away.

At the faculty meeting on April 14th the question came up; the staff had not received the proposed letter from Human Resources. It was left to me to address the issue. I apologized for the delay in receiving notification from HR and the Back-To-Basics school. I went on to tell them that in my opinion the proposed Involuntary Job Fair scheduled for May 16th was untenable given the outline of events that I foresaw coming up on the horizon. The staff was appreciative of my candor, but angry and frustrated at the poor manner they believed they were being treated by the district. The District promised letters to all affected instructional staff would be in the mail on April 30th.

Waiting for Transfer Notices. On Friday May 1st, anticipation was building amongst the instructional staff. Letters of acceptance or placement into the involuntary transfer pool had been mailed to instructional staff members the night before. A math teacher was the first to receive the news as his wife remained at home awaiting the arrival of the mail truck. She opened his letter and promptly, and raced to the school to share the good news with him. Two other teachers received their letters during the day. One was home sick and the second, I am yet to determine how the news was communicated to him. All three teachers were selected for the Back-To Basics School. I left work, with some teachers racing home to check the mail and a few

others uncertain of what the news held for them, attempted to postpone finding out as long as they could. Unfortunately, none stopped to think that their letter may not arrive until Saturday. I wondered how they would cope with this state of anticipation.

The Assistant Principal Interviews. Almost parallel to the teacher interview process, interviews for placement of the Assistant Principals into the Back-To-Basics school was suddenly back on track after a start, stop and a lengthy delay. Now, suddenly time was of the essence. The interviews were conducted at my school site on April 15th. Three AP's interviewed for two positions in the fundamental program. The current and only AP at the Back-To-Basics school and the two AP's at my school, SMS**.**

Sadly, apparently inadvertent actions and statements on my part lead to tense and very strained feelings amongst my administrative team. After the interviews, my female AP told me that, she felt slighted because my actions had favored the other AP a male. She noted that she was sitting in the office waiting for her turn to interview; I failed to acknowledge and wish her good luck. Rather, I had raced out of the office in search of the male AP to coach him before his interview. Secondly, she noted what she perceived as bias when I allegedly said to the male AP, who had not often worn neck ties to work that "you better stock up on new ties". I do not recall ever making this statement, not wishing her the best of luck or racing off to coach the other AP. But at tense times like these; perception was reality and I was left to deftly try to manage my relationship with the female AP for the next two months. The male Ap was selected as the 2nd AP for the Back-To-Basics school.

My Search for a New Assignment

By the end of April there was a posting for a principal's position at a middle school in the district. I applied the next day. On May the 11th I arrived for my principal's interview. The

interview went well and as I left the interview, I walked out into the hallway to be met by several district administrative personnel on their way to the coffee shop. We exchanged pleasantries and they indicated that I would most likely get the nod. I pleaded humility and wondered about the strong pool of applicants I was competing against.

Upon returning to my office from my interview, I found an email with an attachment from my peer principal at the Back-To Basics School. The email was addressed to the two regional superintendents responsible for middle school education. It stated "Please see the attached letter of recommendation. The letter was drafted and sent without any request or prior knowledge of Mr. Effiom. He has shown such leadership skills under difficult circumstances that I just felt the need to express myself". I was stunned. I wondered if this would help. The selection was to be made in a week. A week went by and nothing.

I arrived at work. As was my habit, I turned on my computer to scan the list of emails that had arrived overnight and early in the morning. One email was entitled "congratulations". I opened it; the message was from a principal at one of the consolidating schools. I was taken aback; I did not quite understand the greeting. I tried to reach the principal for clarification, but the individual was not in the office. The events of the morning consumed me and I did not think much of this email. I had one of the end-of- year field trips to chaperone.

Where I Came to Rest

On the following Wednesday morning as I drove to join my 6th grade students for a field trip at a museum of science and Industry, I received a phone call from the personnel department notifying me that I had been selected as the new principal of a magnet middle school; A Fine and Performing Arts magnet located at the opposite end of the school district. I took a deep breath,

and my thoughts turned to my staff at Sylvester. How would I share this information with them? How would they receive this news?

My thoughts were interrupted by the ringing of my cell phone. On the line was a very senior district official. I was congratulated and told that the news was being well received in the community, but that there appeared to be some concern, because I was not well known by the community leaders who were active in the school and the surrounding neighborhoods. I was encouraged to call a certain high ranking city official to begin a dialogue with the community.

 I arrived at the museum, assisted in organizing the students into groups lead by teachers and parent volunteers. The students happily went off to explore the vast reaches of the museum. I called the official and we agreed to meet for dinner at a restaurant that evening.

I arrived home to a heavy downpour and the rain continued all the way to the restaurant. We had a cordial meeting discussing the needs of the school and the concerns of the community. The meeting went well and the official who was well known in the community promised to vouch for me. I returned home.

The next morning at Sylvester middle, I felt that I had to go public with the news. All my staff was delighted and felt I deserved the position and would be an asset to the school. I truly felt sheepish talking to staff members who had not yet received assignments for the new school year. Their feeling was that my case was a special cause and was reason for all to share in my promotion. I truly felt humble and proud to be associated with such fine professionals.

A week later the school year ended, in the midst of completing accounts, inventory audits, transferring property to the new school occupying our facilities, and relocating inventory to the district warehouses; I had to manage the transition into my new position at the Fine Arts magnet school at the opposite end of the county.

I finally thought I would be leaving school politics behind and immerse myself in building a quality magnet program, but a different type of local politics was to occupy my time for the coming twelve months at my new school.

Summary

This chapter captured mainly interview data from the three school principals who experienced the school consolidations in the Evansville School District. Documents like the Teachers' Union contract and extensive reporting of the consolidation in the local press was used as supporting evidence. The chapter provides background information on the school district, the three schools and the three principals. I then provided a summary of research results framed around some key ideas that surfaced repeatedly from a detailed review of interview data. The ideas examined were: (a) anxiety and uncertainty related to the staff and students, (b) communication by the district and school principal with each other, the staff and the community, and (c) issues around equity.

A section related to my consolidation experience was described. This information may be useful in drawing contrasts with the experiences of the three principals represented in this case study. The chapter concludes with a reflection on how the consolidation experience may have affected me.

<center>**Chapter Five**</center>

<center>**Conclusions, Implications, and Recommendations**</center>

Introduction and Overview of Chapter

Chapter Five begins with a brief summary of my study. Next, there is a discussion of the dominant themes found that are framed around my conceptual framework of macro-politics and values and Micro-politics and the school principal. I introduce some of my experiences to draw a contrast or support the perspectives of the three principals studied. The chapter concludes with a section on implications for practice and recommendations for further research.

Discussion of Findings

Fifty to 80% of consolidations of both public and private organizations fail to meet expectations (Bryson, 2003; Cartwright & Cooper, 1996; Epstein, 2005): therefore, it is instructive to examine what determines success or failure

Some issues identified as liabilities of school consolidation include; less parent-teacher interaction; less community support for schools and bond issues for education; lower housing values; more pressure on the property tax base; decreases in educational alternatives available to parents; and the incurrence of one-time costs for new signs, uniforms, stationery (Sher & Tompkins, 1977).

At the organizational level some challenges organizations face includes poor planning, unskilled execution, misalignment of cultures, and talent mismanagement (Linde &

Schalk, 2006; Schuler & Jackson, 2001). As noted by the Conference Board of Canada's Annual Report on Mergers and Acquisitions (2007), the number one challenge for the organization is the integration of culture. One scholar has suggested that a merger is in its broadest context an attempt to combine two cultures (Schein, 1985).

My study examined the question; how did each principal whose school was consolidated and closed experience the school consolidation process? Some specific questions then followed (see Appendix F) to probe for additional information and clarification. This research study described the one year period of time between official notification that a consolidation was to occur and the actual occurrence of the consolidation. The perceptions of three school principals were gathered via interviews and placed in context by using open source school documents and newspaper articles obtained by searching the internet.

School consolidations have taken place throughout the nation and are likely to continue as methods to address budget constraints, demographic shifts and academic performance (MacNeil, 2000). My study is limited to data obtained from interviews of three school principals, open source documents, newspaper articles and my perceptions of a school consolidation I experienced. My findings may not be generalizable to other school consolidation experiences. It describes the personal perceptions of the consolidation experience of three school principals' leadership during this change. This type of merger has "second order change" implications. A second order change takes place when most stakeholders view the change as a break with the past and in conflict with their existing perspectives (Water & Cameron, 2005).

Emerging from the research were several themes that are of importance when considering leadership practices evident during a consolidation. These themes include the tension in principals being the middle person fronting for the process. Principals being used as a buffer to

communicate with all stakeholders and the specific aspects of culture that principals are asked to manage such as symbols in the high schools involved in a consolidation.

Equity

Within the macro-political frame, equity was an important value that emerged from this study as it related to the central role of principal advocacy within the consolidation experience. Advocacy leadership, a form of social justice leadership, addresses issues of equity and politics as well as the moral component of leadership (Anderson, 2009).

Equity remains a major concern in the consolidation of schools. Results of all three consolidations showed that equity may have been given lip service, but the practical consequences of the consolidations was to exacerbate issues around equitable treatment and results for communities whose voices were not loud or unrepresented in the decisions and outcomes of the consolidations. For example, In the process of reassignment of students to new schools Mr. Green observed that "They took some of the smartest kids in our school and let 'em go somewhere else. This left the teachers who had followed their students to the new consolidated site to work from the worst schedules, the worst planning periods and teaching the lowest-functioning kids in the school". The concerns related to equity in this study revolve around two issues.

One issue was the selection of schools as candidates to be closed and consolidated at a different location. It appears that schools in minority or low income areas where often the targets of closure and students from these communities were asked to make the adjustment into new school communities where the receiving students may be ambivalent, but their parents looked on the new arrivals unfavorably.

The second issue was the equitable distribution of services and resources to both staff and students from the closed school at their new school site. Principals who are not sensitive to issues around equity may unknowingly institute practices and make decisions that may be perceived to be fair, but not equitable.

Leaders acting as advocates are compelled to address inequities in order to create an equitable educational environment for every student (Anderson, 2009). An advocacy leader embodies certain beliefs and actions (a) a belief in a high quality and equitable public education for all children and the facilitation of the development of intolerance toward inequity in others and in the school's culture, (b) an awareness to avoid inauthentic policies and situations, (c) are problem solvers who seek the underlying causes of a problem, (d) an understanding of power, and how to use it collaboratively with others, (e) an understanding of politics being a necessary part of the leaders work, (f) are learners who create meaningful learning opportunities for adults, (g) are capable of operating simultaneously on the individual, school, and societal level (Anderson, 2009).

Advocacy leadership is intentional leadership from a political perspective aimed at creating equity for every student. It involves the distribution of leadership and includes the leader follower relationship, and power. If there is not a shift in the deployment of leadership, schools and leaders will continue to legitimize the status quo (Anderson, 2009). To allow the leader to engage in advocacy leadership, political skill is essential.

> Understanding how an individual or group of individuals cooperate and
> compete is important to the study of leadership theory and practice,
> including school-based leadership (Brosky, 2011). Political skill is
> important to study because it helps us understand how people use power

and power processes to achieve their purposes and the purposes of their

organization (Brosky, 2011).

Reaction of the Community. In the consolidations studied, the community reactions were drawn along lines related to equity. Affluent and white members of the communities sought to determine that the effects of a consolidation did not adversely affect their children; while in the poorer communities only certain voices were heard in the interest of their children. In one case, the knowledge or information from the district that their children would be housed in facilities with more resources was sufficient to buy their grudging acceptance.

To avoid the perception that equity may only be given lip service, leaders who are operating from a moral standpoint and employing good political instincts would demonstrate all or parts of the four areas representative of good political skills, namely; (a) social astuteness: the ability to understand the social context, deal with others effectively, and understand how one's own actions, behavior and interactions influence the actions and behaviors of others, (b) interpersonal influence: the ability to remain flexible while influencing others and adapting one's own behavior to different situations. This requires flexibility in order to achieve goals, (c) networking: the ability to mediate, negotiate and manage conflict while being adept at building and maintaining coalitions and networks, (d) sincerity: the possession of integrity, authenticity, sincerity and honesty are essential skill in order to influence others, (Ferris, Treadway, Perrewe, Brouer, Douglas, & Lux, 2007).

District Management of Consolidations

At the district level the appointment of a lead administrator to oversee the consolidation experience appears to vary from district to district. In making this statement, I cannot vouch that a conscious decision was made by district leadership to place anyone in change and delineate a

chain of command. It was not within the scope of my dissertation to seek this information. None of the three principals could provide insight on this matter in my follow-up interviews with them.

In the district studied the district's assistant superintendent of operations was the point man for the district. In my consolidation which was unplanned, the face of the district's process was the head of the district's office of student assignment. The choice in my consolidation experience appears to have been related to familiarity with and a high level of trust from the superintendent's office.

District Strategic Planning

One of the most important decisions for the superintendent and school board is to hire the school principal. The selection of a principal is critical to the academic achievement and social welfare of the staff and students. The choice of principal builds confidence in the district and the satisfaction of parents and the community. Cartwright, S., Tytherleigh, M., & Robertson, S. (2007), note that the neglect and mismanagement of the human aspects of a consolidation (both internal and external) have been increasingly recognized as a cause for concern. It would be unacceptable for the school leader to be the weak link in the chain of events.

School Principals should recognize that their role in implementing a school consolidation remains paramount regardless of the role of district leadership and the decisions made at the district level. Theoharis (2007) suggests that effective leadership creates the necessity for change and facilitates the actualization of change. At the school level; staff, students and the school community are most influenced by the decisions and management choices selected by the school principal while district pronouncements have minimal impact on the reception of news of a consolidation.

Research indicates that, as the formal leaders at school sites, principals have the most influence on school-level decisions because the school principal has the strongest influence on teacher motivation and working conditions (Louis et al., 2010). This makes the school principal the most important individual in determining the success or failure of a school consolidation as it relates to the staff and students in the year prior to the closing of a school.

Change/Uncertainty

One of the key responsibilities of the school principal is the management of the teaching staff who are at the frontline of daily contact with students and impact the climate and student achievement levels of a school. Teacher uncertainty/anxiety is a key consideration for leaders during a consolidation. Anxiety was a key trait found in all three consolidations. Teachers dealt with anxiety for the standpoint of having to move to a new and unfamiliar worksite, face new students, parents and community and deal with a new principal who may not embody the leadership styles they have been accustomed to dealing with at their current school site.

District and school leadership may enjoy a distinct advantage in a planned consolidation. The fact that decisions affecting staff had been pre-negotiated provided a sense of impartiality to individual staff. Discussions revolving around policy rather than specific leaders choices tend to provide more trust and consistency to staff members.

In all consolidations, job security was guaranteed, but concerns around acceptance, fair and equitable treatment in the new setting were major sources of uncertainty and anxiety. A planned consolidation was shown to have some distinct advantages for the principals involved. The central role of fear and uncertainty related to job security was removed by the presence of a written protocol that affirms that all tenured staff would be placed in a comparable position of

their choice at another site. Ms. Purple states this by saying "Well, my teachers didn't have to fear—I mean because like I said, they wanted to place everybody you know"

My consolidation experience had the unique characteristic of being largely unpredictable. Virtually all decision making was done on an ad hoc case-by-case basis with no assurance of consistency. In this environment, building trust and confidence in the fairness of the process are magnified as leadership concerns to be managed carefully.

But having said this, the reality of the experience showed that all staff members were stressed by the consolidation and while it may initially appear that having a negotiated process to place teachers would reduce anxiety, this did not happen. Nothing was gained by the presence of the planned consolidation process.

School Culture-Tensions about Traditions versus Change

School culture is a powerful term that may not be accessible to one definition that gives full meaning. Alkire (1995) says that school culture is an aspect of a school that is often overlooked in educational settings. Barth (2002) calls school culture "a complex pattern of norms, attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, values, ceremonies, traditions, and myths that are deeply ingrained in the very core of the organization. While Peterson and Deal (1998) define it as" the underground streams of norms, values, beliefs, traditions and rituals that have built up over time as people work together, solve problems and confront challenges. The key is that Stolp (1996) says that the school culture plays an essential role in how people think and act.

Given these definitions, culture plays an important role in how the school goes about dealing with the challenges imposed by a consolidation. I would suggest that the culture of each school should be carefully considered to ensure a smooth transition. That is, not only the culture

of the respective student bodies and families, but also the culture of the respective staffs being joined.

Community members and other stakeholders dealing with leaders who embody the traits of inclusive leadership practices are more likely to provide community support and engage in crafting solutions that better serve their community's interests.

One area that members of a community could be influential in crafting solutions deals with the experience of the high school that was moved to effect the middle school consolidation. There, current and former students of the high school were vocal in drawing attention to the traditions of their high school and the symbols of that tradition. Currently in one consolidated school, there remains a dedicated section of the hallway to the trophies and banners of the former high school.

In my school consolidation experience, there were district statements suggesting that a small museum would be housed at a closed elementary school to display district historical artifacts, trophies and symbols from various closed schools. This has not happened and the subject has apparently fallen off the map.

While this interpretivist study examined the experiences of three school principals when their metropolitan public school was consolidated several insights may be gleamed from their experiences related to the needs of students, issues related to equity, school culture, communication and trust, and the principal's management responsibilities.

These relationships are grounded on the principal's role as an advocate for students. It calls for a reform leadership that includes the school, the district and society with the intent on leveling wrongs in order to create equity, thus creating a high quality education for all students and a just society that produces independent thinking citizens (Anderson, 2009).

While still responsible for change at the school level, the advocacy leader is charged with promoting change at the system (district) level in order to correct the underlying injustices within our system and society. In addition, the leader responsibilities and relationships are expanded beyond the schoolhouse to include external partners in recognition of the complexity and political nature of change and of leadership in schools (Anderson, 2009).

Communication

The role of district leadership in a school consolidation is of critical importance. In a consolidation, while the operational mechanics may have been codified; trust and the careful articulation of the reasons for a consolidation are critical elements in the perception of all stakeholders to the process. This includes internal stakeholders such as staff and students, and external stakeholders in the form of parents and the larger community affected by a loss of a community symbol. None of the three consolidations showed evidence of an orderly planned strategy to present a clear, consistent message to all stakeholders. The task was generally delegated to the school principal to articulate this decision. Communication and the articulation of the district's philosophy and policies is too critical a function to be left to chance or the individual abilities of each principal.

District Notification of Consolidation. The decision to consolidate schools originates at the level of the superintendent of schools followed by a presentation and vote by the School Board. At this level of deliberations, it appears that sharing detailed data related to finances and demographics would be made to better capture stakeholder understanding and support for the moves. At the school level, a coherent presentation of the facts appears not to have occurred. General statements about declining enrollment and district budget shortfalls appear to be standard talking points.

Notification generally, arrives first via the rumor mill, followed by editorials and press clippings. Finally one would need to read between the lines of Board agendas and minutes to decipher the possibility or need for some restructuring model.

In the three consolidations studied, the principal had gleamed information from outside sources. By the time the district leadership made an official notification to school leadership, the information was common knowledge. This may have precluded the principal from shaping the message in a cohort and non-threatening format, given the protections found in the union contract.

Dealing with Notification of Consolidation

In my school consolidation experience, I have detailed the less than forthright manner the consolidation message was delivered to me. The absence of district guidance in what, when and how to notify staff while projecting an image of trust and transparency that would be essential at the school level for the duration of the consolidation was an added decision I had to navigate in isolation. The levels of uncertainty and fear are magnified in this unpredictable environment with all staff facing the loss of security and team comfort. Staff, while implicitly assured of some job security still faced the challenges of burnishing resumes and interview skills while interviewing for available positions like a new teacher to the district.

In my experience, it appears that the decision to consolidate had been made behind closed doors with a formal ratification by the school Board being the last step. I was never told of the decision; rather the language used was "the topic would be on the Board agenda". I was left to draw my conclusions and act accordingly. I believe the absence of a planned procedural road map contributed to the difficulty district leadership encountered in communicating their

intentions to me effectively and in a timely manner. This served to generate additional anxiety and concern among staff at my inability to address all issues in a forthright fashion.

For the school principal, this situation created enormous tension in the principal because now the principal is left to be the middle man fronting for a process in a climate in which all the facts related to the consolidation had not been shared with the principal. Furthermore, the principal is left as a buffer between the stakeholders and the school district. This is a difficult position to occupy with less than complete knowledge of the events to take place.

The principal was thus left to essentially lie to his/her staff that all would be well as noted by Ms. Garner "That's how you know, it's going to be best for us, and this is going to be good, although I didn't believe it. I had to ask God to forgive me for lying at that time because I knew a lot of it had to do with politics, too, you know, but—and in your role as principal, you know what you have to do in order to make things easier. I mean you just do things naturally. You just do it, yes"

In the consolidations studied the principal was used as a buffer to communicate with various school stakeholders. In my experience, I was left to decide when, how and what rationale would be provided to the staff as to the reasons and expectations for the school consolidation at my hastily called meeting with staff in the Media Center.

With the principal's integrity left on the line, notions of trust in leadership as a key ingredient of climate and school culture are left to the uncertainty of future events. This is all contrary to the attributes that have been detailed in the literature as important characteristics for all leaders to carefully cultivate and nurture.

Time Management by School Principal

It is vital for the superintendent to hire principals who have the leadership skills to simultaneously focus on student learning, management, culture, and leadership. One notable challenge is that the principal must possess not only the necessary skill set, but must also have sufficient time and time management skills to engage in these professional responsibilities while managing the added responsibilities of the consolidation. Research on high school principals by both Louis et al. (2010) and Grubb (2006) found that high school principals repeatedly have expressed a lack of time to complete all of their duties.

From the principals perspective, the overall school based experience is quite similar whether a planned or unplanned consolidation process is in place. In the three consolidations studied all the principals were long term school leaders at the school site being consolidated.

In my case, while I had served as an Assistant Principal for three years at my school, I had been returned to the consolidating school a year later as an Acting Principal. It was from this position I was charged to manage and complete my school's consolidation two months after arriving back at the school. I continue to wonder if district leadership was aware of an impending consolidation at the school. If aware, how much thought was given to the placement of a new and relatively inexperienced leader at the helm at such a critical time?

Human resource management and integration represents a well-documented challenge in a school consolidation, but organizational management poses another form of challenge because many consolidations fail to deliver on their promised financial projections (Harwood & Ashliegh, 2005; Marks, 2006). If an organization is chaotic or disorganized as it may very well be at the onset of a school's consolidation or become so, as decisions impacting various sites and stakeholders begin to overlap; the leader must begin by ensuring effective time management

184

strategies are being employed. It is important for the leader to carefully analyze how time is spent on various administrative tasks (Mezzacappa, D., Holland, H., Willen, L., Colvin, R. L., & Feemster, R. 2008).

Implications for Practice

The findings described in chapter 4 may be examined from two vantage points, what it means for the Evansville School District and what it means from my story. Researchers in the business sector who have examined the high failure rates of mergers like Achtmeyer and Daniell (1988) have suggested that failure rates could be improved through systematic planning. In this study, the centrality of systematic planning may be examined from the areas of strategic communication, pre and post consolidation, and during the consolidation process.

Recommendations as to the best approach to manage and complete consolidations are difficult to make because each consolidation experience will occur within a different context and involve different rationales, community dynamics, school settings, initiatives and key players; but it is hoped that the information contained in this study will be useful to planners in thinking about the consolidation experience, the processes, consolidation needs and the development of unique strategies to complete consolidations.

Equity

When consolidation plans are developed it should be considered that the transfers of predominantly minority or low income children to different schools could exacerbate the children's feeling of little or no control. Kirp (1995) writes, "What deserves attention, in the name of equity, is the content of teachers' exchanges with students, teachers 'conversations with one another and with parents after school, and professional dialogue as well".

Pre-consolidation

The absence of a plan with a framework of timelines to complete a list of pre-identified critical tasks left planners and stakeholders confused as to the expected events that individual groups might have felt very important. This oversight inadvertently sent an unintended message that the needs of a certain group may not be as important to the planners as the planners general statements would lead one to believe. For example, the needs of students could have been firmly established, by confirming the placement of an administrator from the closed school at the consolidated school to ensure students arriving at the school may feel a sense of continuity**.**

During Consolidation

During the final year the school remained opened, very little was revealed from leaders and other stakeholders about the student achievement impact of the consolidation experience. These consolidations were not initiated due to academic performance, but it was illustrative that the topic never came up except as related to upper income families seeking like-minded environment for their students. Discussions about improved academic opportunities for students of closed and consolidated schools may be a useful tool in building a higher level of acceptance and cooperation from the stakeholders impacted by this experience.

Post Consolidation

The findings from this study suggest the importance of active district and school leadership planning and management of the post-merger integration process. This study reveals the need for further thought and brain storming as to how the process of human integration can be better managed as a parallel function to organizational management (Procedures and processes, physical assets). It would appear that management of organizational systems like the

allocation and movement of resources was being adequately addressed , little was discussed

regarding the integration of human resources as related to staff and particularly students.

District Strategic Planning

A recommendations for all districts anticipating a consolidation experience is the notion

of planning and articulating a district strategic plan as it relates to not only the selection process

for schools to be closed, but even more important is the careful public articulation of the reasons

for consolidation, planning for consolidation, timeline for initiation and completion of the

process, details of the policies and procedures to be employed and management functions to be

executed.

Community Liaisons

The appointment of community liaisons who would be a central point of contact for

families and other external stakeholders is highly recommended. As I learned from one of my

conversational partners, the community liaisons should be drawn from both outside and inside

the school system. However, extreme care should be taken in handling the selection process for

this team. Respect and knowledge of the immediate school community needs to be a key

qualifying asset. Once selected the liaisons should be thoroughly and careful trained on the facts

of the consolidation, issues of equity and taught to liaison effectively with the community, and

navigate the internal workings of the school system.

If you think I'm a Bad Ass Now, wait 'til I get to my Next School

My conversational partners noted that there were certain cultural traits shared by high

schools that made them different from the other levels of public education. It was noted by one

principal that the history and traditions represented by both tangible artifacts and the intangible

symbols of high schools provided an added layer of concern in dealing with the community

when a high school consolidation is under consideration. For example, the feelings of ownership demonstrated by current high school students who have their own logos painted on their personal parking spots on the school campus.

The literature on school consolidations describes general effects and outcomes of various school consolidations. Often, an examination is done on a consolidation site that may have been at any of the three levels of a k-12 school system, college or university system. Little can be found describing the similarities, differences or unique attributes inherent in consolidations occurring at the three different levels of a k-12 school system.

While all of my three school sites were middle schools, some insights were gained from the high school situation. One of the three middle schools in my case study was consolidated into a closing and consolidating high school. I will take a few paragraphs to share what I learned.

Mr. Green, one of my conversational partners observed that "I knew this would happen. Our community was not like the high school community at any of the other three middle schools that closed. A few in our community did fight for us to—but at the high school they went out en mass—I'm talking 'bout serious mass to not close that high school".

Ms. Orange talking about the cultural aspects of a high school as distinguished from the K-8 schools noted that high school students had the resources to advocate independently from or in addition to their parents on matters that affected their education. They picketed out front of the school board office and the district office for weeks to save their high school. Students from the high school spoke at school district board meetings. They also picketed the superintendent's office and meetings, and marched downtown to keep their school open.
Mr. Green says "They had to put extra law enforcement on because they wanted to keep WH High School open. It got to be, at times, sort of eerie there". Students even had some T shirts

made that said—'I'll never forget this. "If you think I'm a bad ass now, wait 'til I get to my next school".

The high school involved in this consolidation had been opened in the 1960's and one can imagine all the trophies they had, the yearbooks going back 40-50 years and pictures of the successive principals of the school that was on display. They noted the role played by alumni of the high school who still maintained contacts to the school from involvement as boosters to those who simple had sentimental attachments like "I'm a graduate of that school. I don't want it to close". These traditions and features were not present at the younger levels of the public schools and added their own special challenges in the consolidation environment and processes.

Student Needs

One of the themes developed from my study was the notable absence of discussion related to the impact of a consolidation on students of the middle schools in the final year the school was open before the consolidation went into effect. There were limited efforts to prepare or socialize the students for their arrival at their new schools or discussions about their feelings about their current school being closed.

According to Anderson (2009), current reform efforts lack the critical elements of advocacy leadership and are not based on events related to education. Instead, they are based upon the business, market model and aimed not at students, but at business concerns (Cuban, 2004). A deficit perspective exists in reform with a focus on outcomes rather than students. These efforts often cause more inequity. Advocacy leaders attempt to disrupt the inequities and maintaining a focus on the good of children and the good of society (Anderson, 2009).

It is important that student needs be placed at the top of the principal's agenda while navigating a school through a consolidation experience. First, the students have to be told in

some detail the causes of the consolidation, what the school experience might look like in the final year before closing and final an outreach should be made to the major receiving schools to educate the students about the new school, it culture and other characteristics. Finally, every effort should be made to organize field trips to the new school for students transitioning into that school the next school year.

Strategic Communication

In the consolidations studied district communication with school leadership, stakeholders and the community was managed without a coherent, planned process. Information was disseminated to those most likely to fall within the leadership matrix with little concern as to the applicability of the information to the selected end user.

Communication and Trust

As in all consolidations effective, accurate and timely communication with all stakeholders remains the primary challenge. Trust, as the most important commodity in a consolidation can only be enhanced by timely and accurate communication. Often, events preclude the timely dissemination of information, but it should be understood that these delays whether controllable by the principal or not remain the single most important factor in creating stress, uncertainty and anxiety for stakeholders. For example, while all staff may not transfer to the consolidated institution, it was noted by one principal that appointment of staff to certain assignments may not have been perceived to be equitable.

Principal's Management Obligations

Operational procedures should also be reviewed and staff trained to understand their role in the effective execution of the consolidation. It was noted that in the district with a preplanned process for consolidation, leadership may have unwittingly neglected to appreciate their role in

ensuring the smooth execution of all procedures. There was a feeling of "that's all been taken care of by the district people". Vigilance by the principal should remain an essential ingredient in the success of the consolidation. Riggio and Conger (2007) have suggested that the practice of leadership is one of the most complex aspects of what people do. They warn that good leadership practice depends on "doing the right thing under particular circumstances-taking into account the task, the followers, the situation, the timing, and the process" (Riggio and Conger, 2007 p. 123)

Implications for Research

Lessons learned and insights gained from this study reveal some areas requiring additional research. About 50 % to 80 % of consolidations /mergers fail to meet expectations (Bryson, 2003; Cartwright & Cooper, 1996; Epstein, 2005) so any lessons or insights gained from better understanding the experience may help improve chances of success or reduce the number of poor experiences. Challenging areas found in this consolidation study include, equity issues resulting from the schools selected for closure, the abrupt decision to refuse admission to new students in schools targeted to close, the need to focus on students' wellbeing in the final year before a consolidating school closes and the distinctions between consolidations at each of the three levels of K-12 education.

The role of principal leadership in a consolidation is one challenging are that stands out as a significant limitation of this study. Information contained in this study is mostly obtained from principal interviews. I have shown that a significant area of concern in all three consolidations relates to the absence of discussions around social justice. While the principals profess a commitment to their communities and their students, this study did not examine parents and community members as to their feelings on equity, their perception of school leadership or their children's experiences in the schools.

Distinctions between Consolidations at each of the Three Levels of K-12 Education

Finally, I would recommend a research study on the distinctions between consolidations at each of the three levels of K-12 education; elementary, middle and high schools. As noted in my study all principals were quick to state that the high school consolidation appeared to add an additional layer of active stakeholder, namely the students of high school age.

Equity

I would suggest further research to address issues around equity in a school consolidation and the absence of leadership for social justice in the context of a school consolidation. While the issues start with a lack of or inadequate access to information as noted by (Bell, Jones, & Johnson, 2002) when discussing issues like school choice plans who noted that upper income and connected families tend to have unfair advantages in the choice game and generally have the extra resources needed to support their children's attendance at an out-of-district school . The concerns extend to the options made available for students that may not be compatible with existing family structures and resources. For example, Bast and Walberg (2004) found that transportation problems and inflexible work schedules prevented participation by parents of low SES in decisions related to the education of their children.

Closing Admission to New Students

In all three consolidated schools it was noted that district practice was to remove the school to be closed and consolidated from the normal student enrollment cycle. The school to be closed was prevented from enrolling new students who would normally have been assigned to the school. The feeling of being in an environment when the population is slowly allowed to decline prior to closing may appear to exacerbate the feeling of gloom and failure inherent in the environment. It appears to be a practical answer to the operational requirements of a planned

school closing, but is this the best policy for maintaining morale and a positive sense of well-being in a school and school community beset with the uncertainty and anxiety already present due to the impending closing?

Focus On Students' Needs Prior to School Closure

Another area for study would be the experiences, feelings and perceptions of middle school students during the final year of a school consolidation prior to the closure of the school. There is some body of research that after a consolidation and students report to their new schools; they adapt better than teachers to the social disruption caused by consolidation. Students generally enjoyed more diverse social opportunities and academic benefits after consolidation. But what experiences, concerns or anxieties were present during that last year at their closing schools. How can leadership improve that experience?

The Role of Principal Leadership in a Consolidation

A gap currently exists in the literature with regard to the role of the principal in managing a school consolidation. Existing studies on leadership in school consolidation revolve around the role of the superintendent in facilitating this process (Alsbury & Shaw, 2005; Alsbury & Thomas, 2008). Additionally, research on consolidation has centered mostly on the costs and benefits of school consolidation policies (Nitta et al., 2008). But the examination of principal leadership practice within the context of a school consolidation remains unclear; particularly the role of political leadership in winning stakeholder acceptance of a pending consolidation.

Leadership effectiveness is partly dependent upon the leader's ability to employ political skills which is an important and necessary element of leadership (Brosky, 2011). Political skill is defined as "the ability to effectively understand others at work and to use such knowledge to influence others to act in ways that enhance organizational objectives" (Ferris, Treadway,

Perrewe, Brouer, Doublas, & Lux, 2007, p.291). Principals influence followers through the use

of persuasion, manipulation and negotiation Therefore, political awareness and skill is a

necessary ingredient to successfully lead an organization (Brosky, 2011).

Advocacy leadership

One specific area in leadership that remains unclear is the principal acting as a

transformative leader practicing advocacy leadership. The literature reviewed lead me to

conclude that there is limited research on how advocacy leaders face the day-to-day challenges

of leadership (Anderson, 2009); specifically how advocacy leadership would or should be

enacted in the political context of the special type of change that a school consolidation

represents.

Epilogue-How have I been Transformed?

In the years after the end of the consolidation experience, staff that experienced the last

year at Sylvester middle school has generally fared well and remain in the educational field. One

staff member died the year after the consolidation, but more than fifty percent of Sylvester staff

continues to meet at least twice a year at organized social gatherings to catch up on news and

generally enjoy the company of colleagues. Some wounds remain in a few personal relationships

and old hatchets have mostly been buried. The intervening time has provided me an opportunity

to reflect on some areas that have influenced my thinking and perspective going forward. These

areas are positive thinking, politics in education and ethical decision making by leaders.

Positive Thinking. The most transformative aspect of this experience has been the

central role a positive disposition brings to challenging and uncertain situations. I believe the

benefits are twofold. First, the leaders is allowed to project an air of confidence in the possibility

of a favorable outcome to the teachers impacted by the events under consideration, provides

space to manage decision making options in a calm, balanced and thoughtful manner and personally serves to reduce stress and increase the stamina of the leader to work through the challenges successfully. Second, teachers are able to perceive a climate of empathy and feelings that the process is a shared experience; they are not isolated in dealing with the challenges to be confronted.

 "Positive thinking is the conscious and deliberate effort to manage one's own thoughts, emotions, speech, non-verbal behavior, and beliefs in such a way that one entertains only the possibility of good outcomes and not the possibility of bad outcomes, for any difficult or challenging set of circumstances," (McGrath, Jordens et al., 2006, pp.666).

Positive thinking is based on the belief that the mind can exert a powerful influence on the body. In our society, the idea that the mind has power over the body is embedded in our cultural mores; that is the belief in the power of the individual to understand and control outcomes and events in our lives. Clinically, positive thinking has been associated with several health benefits, including the use of more effective coping strategies (Gillham, Shatte, Reivich, & Seligman, 2002).

Ethical Decision Making. On a personal level, I often quickly dissect educational policy decisions by reflecting on one of the most used phrases in education "making decisions based on what's best for children (students)". It is a great maxim and should be the central guiding principle in decision-making in education. But I am aware of the many competing ideals that run at cross currents to each other in both the micro and macro levels in education that require very careful and sophisticated decision making skills. The competing forces of economics, equity, academic achievement and social goals often require that the decision maker work along a continuum to ensure our choices are faithful to the maxim "children first'.

When the choice is easy or very little is at stake, nearly all players are happy to dance to that tune, but introduce some uncertainty, conflict or competing choices and the land of "children first" may sometimes be inadvertently abandoned for other goals or objectives. As a student with a degree in Philosophy, I am concerned that educational leaders do not receive sufficient training in ethics to better prepare us to analyze and make good rational choices that lie beyond the realm of simple utilitarianism.

Politics of Education

A second impact of the consolidation experience is the realization of the overbearing role politics plays in the educational options, available opportunities and the experiences of children and families. While politics has always been an integral part of school, the Supreme Court's decision in Brown vs. Board of Education from Topeka Kansas and the civil rights movement of the late '60s have placed the politics of education as it relates to equity and diversity at the center of schooling.

According Marshall (2002), the research in the politics of education can be divided into four main arenas: (1) federal, (2) state, (3) district, and (4) micro political for the purposes of focus and organization mostly recognizing that events are interrelated and effects often impact all levels simultaneously.

Federal Level. The federal government has always had a role in financing education since the drafting of the Constitution. However, despite a limited (although growing) financial role, the federal government has an immense amount of influence on education. Sroufe (1995) identifies this influence in two ways-policy and politics. He defines policy analysis as the "examination of the degree to which what is happening is what is intended in an actual or

preferred situation, i.e. who gets what" (Sroufe, 1995, p.77). While Political processes, on the

other hand produce policy.

The increasing focus on issues of diversity in the politics of education mentioned earlier

presumably plays itself out in the federal arena in policy analyses dealing with race (Baker,

2000; McCoy, 2000), gender (Marshall & Anderson, 1995), and socio-economic status (Werum,

1999; Wong & Sunderman, 2000) and bilingual education (Crawford, 2000; Sosa, 2000).

State Level. Increasingly, states are taking more of an active role in education,

particularly in an effort to equalize funding across districts (Odden & Picus, 2000) and to drive

reform efforts. Prior to the '90s, state departments of education have focused on the gate

keeping functions of licensure of teachers and administrators, required days of attendance, and in

some cases curriculum content (Wirt, 1977). Now, states are immersed in reform efforts that

originate from the state legislature, governor's office, and the education department. Attention at

the state level is thus focused on state reform policy analyses and the politics of state reform

efforts as it related to academic performance and social justice and diversity perspectives

(Scheurich & Skrla, 2001; Valencia, 2001). New areas include issues around sexual orientation.

District Level. At the district level few distinctions exist between policy and political

analyses. The bulk of the conflict tends to be related to the political examination of the

"relationship between inputs (resources and demands) to the political process and outputs (policy

and programs) of that process as well as the subsequent outcomes of such outputs" (Iannaccone

& Lutz, 1995, p.39).   The role of choice and access continue to gain traction at the state and

district levels.

Micro-political Arena. While the federal, state, and district levels are primarily the

policymaking levels of government. Micro politics operates at the level at which areas of

contention include; interactions between teachers, between students and teachers, budgets and resource allocation, school diversity and race, ethnicity and economic status, and gender and sexual orientation.

At this level the focus is on the effects of the policies created at higher levels on those for whom the policies were designed. This level provides the most insights about individual interactions and leader decision-making processes in relation to the publics they serve (Malen, 1995).

Summary

Consolidation of two schools within one school district involves significant stress and anxiety for staff, students and leaders. Not only are there organizational demands, but the demands on human integration and the loss or change in cultures takes time and considerable planning and thought to address effectively. Effective, sustained and positive leadership at the school level is a key ingredient to provide direction, multi-tiered levels of clear and direct communication, build consensus in staff. By engaging the involvement of staff in facilitating the early stages of change and integrate different school cultures the foundations for a new vision for the stakeholders in the consolidated school can be laid.

As I conclude this dissertation, the press is highlighting Titus Middle school, one of the consolidated schools that received students from the closed Bryant Middle School for its poor academic performance having earned successive grades of "F" on the state accountability measure. There are calls for triggering the state turnaround options including closing the school and converting it into a charter school.

This is one case in which a consolidation may not have solved the problems of the school, but may have created new concerns by bring more struggling students together in one setting.

References

Abrams, R. M. (2006). America transformed: Sixty years of revolutionary change, 1941-2001. Cambridge, MA: University Press.

Alesina, A., Reza, B., and Hoxby, C., (2004). Political jurisdictions in heterogeneous communities. Journal of Political Economy 112 (2): 348–96.

Alesina, A., and Spolaore, E., (1997). On the number and size of nations. Quarterly Journal of Economics 112 (4): 1027–1056

Alford, B., (Fall 1960).School District Reorganization and Community Integration. Harvard Educational Review 30 (4), 350-371

Anderson, G. (2009). *Advocacy Leadership toward a post-reform agenda in education*. New York, NY: Routledge Taylor and Francis Group

Andrews, M., Duncombe W., and Yinger, J., (2002). Revisiting economies of size in education: Are we any closer to a consensus? Economics of Education Review 21 (3):245–262.

Appelbaum, S. H., Lefrancois, F., Tonna, R., & Shapiro, B. T. (2007). Mergers 101 (part two): Training managers for culture, stress, and change challenges. Industrial and Commercial Training, 39(4), 191–200.

Austin, D. A. (1999). Politics vs. economics: Evidence from municipal annexation. Journal of Urban Economics 45 (3): 501–532.

Bacharach, S. B., & Mundell, B. L. (1993). Organizational politics in schools: Micro, macro and logics of action. Educational Administration Quarterly, 29(4), 423-452.

Ball, S. (1987). *The micro-politics of the school towards a theory of school organization*. London: Methuen & Co. Ltd.

Barker, R. G., and Gump V. P., (1964). Big school, small school: High school size and student behavior. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Barnhart, D. K., & Metcalf, A. A. (1997). *America in so many words: Words that have shaped America.* Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.

Bartels, J, Douwes, R., de Jong, M., & Pruyn, A. (2006). Organizational identification during a merger: Determinants of employees' expected identification with the new organization. *British Journal of Management*. *17*, 49-67.

Bass, B. M. (2007). Executive and strategic leadership. *International Journal of Business*, 12(1), 34-52.

Bass, B. M., & Avolio, B. J. (1990). Developing transformational leadership: 1992 and beyond. *Journal of European Industrial Training*, *14*, 21-27.

Bass, B. (1985). *Leadership and performance beyond expectations*. New York, NY: The Free Press.

Bennis, W. (1989). *Why leaders can't lead*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Bennis, W. G., & Nanus, B. (1985). *Leaders*: *The strategies for taking charge*. NY: Harper & Row.

Berkowitz, E. D. (2006). *Something happened: A political and cultural overview of the seventies*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.

Berry, C., & Martin W., (2005). Growing pains: The school consolidation movement and student outcomes. PEPG Working Paper 05-04.

Berry, C. (2005) School district consolidation and student outcomes: Does size matter? In W. Briscoe, F., Arriaza, G., & Henze, R. (2009). *The power of talk: How words change our lives.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Beschloss, M. (2007). *Presidential courage: Brave leaders and how they changed America 1789-1989*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.

Bickford, S. (June 2000) "Constructing Inequality: City Spaces and the Architecture of Citizenship," Political Theory 28, no. 3: 355-376

Blank, R. K., Levine, R. E., & Steel, L. (1996). After 15 years: Magnet schools in urban education. In B. Fuller, R. F. Elmore, & G. Orfield (eds.), *Who chooses? Who loses? Culture, institutions, and the unequal effects of school choice.* Teachers College Press.

Blanke, D. (2002). *The 1910s*. Westport, CT: Greenwood.

Bogotch, I. (2000). Educational leadership and social justice: Theory into practice. *Journal of School Leadership*, 12(2), 138-156.

Borman, K. M., Eitle, T. M, Michael, D., Eitle, D. J., Lee, R., Brianson, L., Cobb-Roberts, D., Dorn, S., Shircliffe, B. (2004). Accountability in a post desegregation era: The continuing significance of racial segregation in Florida's schools. *American Educational Research Journal, 41*(3), 605–631.

Boss, S. (2001) "Big Lessons on a Small Scale." Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory. Located at http://www.nwrel.org/nwedu/winter_00/1.html

Bridges, W. (1991). Managing transitions: Making the most of change. Cambridge, MA: Da Capro Press.

Bridges, W. (2001). The way of transition: Embracing life's most difficult moments. Cambridge, MA: Da Capro Press.

Brasington, D. M. (1999). Joint provision of public goods: The consolidation of school districts. Journal of Public Economics 73 (3): 373–393.

Brianson, L. (2007). Rethinking successful school leadership in challenging U.S. schools: Culturally responsive practices in school-community relationship. *International Studies in Educational Administration, 35*(3), 49-57.

Brodinsky, B. (1977). Back to the basics: The movement and its meaning. *Phi Delta Kappan, 58*(7), 522-527.

Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas, 347 U.S. 483 (1954).

Brubacher, J. S., & Rudy, W. (1997). *Higher education in transition* (4th Ed.). New Brunswick, GA: Transaction.

Burns, J. M. (2003). *Transforming leadership: A new pursuit of happiness.* New York, NY: Atlantic Monthly Press.

Bustamante, R., Nelson, J. A., & Onwuegbuzie, A. J. (2009). Assessing school-wide cultural competence: Implications for school leadership preparation. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 45*(5), 793-827.

Cartwright, S., Tytherleigh, M., & Robertson, S. (2007). Are mergers always stressful? Some evidence from the higher education sector. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology,* 16(4), 456 – 478.

Chafe, W. H. (2003). *The unfinished journey: America since World War II.* NY: Oxford University Press.Cooper, C. W. (2009). Performing cultural work in demographically changed schools: Implications for expanding transformative leadership framework. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 45*(5), 694-724.

Conger, J. A., & Kanungo, R. N. (1987). Toward a behavioral theory of charismatic leadership in organizational settings. *Academy of Management Review*, *12*(4), 637-647. Retrieved on June 21, 2007, from EBSCO host database.

Cotton, K. (1996). "School Size, School Climate, and Student Performance." Northwest
      Regional Educational Laboratory, School Improvement Research Series, Close-up #20,
      Located at http://www.nwrel.org/scpd/sirs/10/c20.html

Cox, B., & Cox, B. (2010). A decade of results: A case for school district consolidation?
      Education, 131(1), 83-92.

Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five
      approaches.* (2nd ed.) Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Cubberley, E. P. (1909). *Changing the conception of education*. Boston: Houghton
      Mifflin.

Cunningham, B. (2003). A study of the relationship between school cultures and student
      achievement. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. University of Central Florida, Orlando,
      FL.

Dantley, M. (2003) "Purpose-driven leadership: The Spiritual imperative to guiding beyond
      high- stakes testing and minimum proficiency." *Education and Urban Society* 35, no. 3:
      273-291.

de la Torre, M. and Gwynne, J. (2009). When Schools Close: Effects on Displaced Students in
      Chicago Public Schools. Consortium on Chicago School Research

Des Moines Register. (2006). 365 School districts are picture of inefficiency. Editorial.
      November 25.

Dogan, R. (2006, October 21). School consolidation is the best way to improve education for all.
      Pensacola News Journal. Retrieved January 20, 2014, from http://www.pnj.com/

Duncan, M. (2004). Auto ethnography: Critical appreciation of an emerging art. *International
      Journal of Qualitative Methods, 3*(4), 1-14.

Duncombe, W. D. and Yinger, J. (2001). Does School District Consolidation Cut Costs?
      Syracuse University – Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs Center for
      Policy Research Working Paper No. 33. Available at SSRN:
      http://ssrn.com/abstract=1808202

English, F.W. (2003) *the Postmodern Challenge to the Theory and Practice of Educational
      Administration.* Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas Publisher, LTD.

Evans, H. (1998). *The American century*. New York, NY: Alfred Knopf.

Evans, M. G. (1970). The effects of supervisory behavior on the path-goal relationship
      Organizational Behavior and Human Performance. 5, 277-298.

Ewing, E. T., & Hicks, D. (Eds.). (2006). *Education and the great depression: Lessons from a global history*. New York, NY: Peter Lang.

Fail, A. (2006, June 29). Woodham High faithful forge plan to save school. Pensacola News Journal. Retrieved January 20, 2014, from http://www.pnj.com/

Farling, M. L., Stone, A. G., & Winston, B. E. (1999). Servant leadership: Setting the stage for Empirical Research. *The Journal of Leadership Studies, 6*(1/2), 49-72.

Ferris, G., Treadway, D., Perrewe, P., Brouer, R., Douglas, C., & Lux, S. (2007). Political skill in organizations. *Journal of Management*, 33(3), 290-320.

Fischer, C. S., & Hout, M. (2006) *Century of difference: How America changed in the last one hundred years*. NY: Russell Sage Foundation.

Flanagan, J. C. (1954). The critical incident technique. *Psychological Bulletin*, *51*, 327-358.

Flexner, S. B. (1982). *Listening to America: An illustrated history of words and phrases from our lively and splendid past*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.

Frankenburg, E., & Orfield, G. (Eds.) (2007). *Lessons in integration: Realizing the promise of racial diversity in American schools.* Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press.

Frankenberg, E., Siegel-Hawley, G., & Wang, J. (2010). *Choice without equity: Charter school segregation and the need for Civil Rights standards.* Los Angeles, CA: The Civil Rights Project/Proyecto Derechos Civiles at UCLA; Available at www.civilrightsproject.ucla.edu.

Freire, P. (1993). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: The International Publishing Group.

Frosch, D. (2007). Five days; an insider conviction. *New York Times*, April 21. Retrieved on May 23, 2007, from nytimes.com/top/reference/times topics/people/n/ Joseph_P_Nacchio/index.html

Fullan, M. (1991). *Leading in a culture of change*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Fullan, M. (2005). *Leadership & sustainability: Systems thinkers in action*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Fuller, B., Elmore, R. F., & Orfield, G. (1996). *Who chooses? Who loses? Culture, institutions, and the unequal effects of school choice.* Teachers College Press.

Gardner, W. L., Avolio, B. J., Luthans, F., May, D. R., & Walumbwa, F. (2005). "Can you see the real me?" A self-based model of authentic leader and follower development. *The Leadership Quarterly, 16*, 343-372.

Goldin, C. (1999). Egalitarianism and the returns to education during the great transformation of American education. *The Journal of Political Economy*, *107*(6-part 2), 565-594.

Goldin, C., & Katz, L. F. (1999). The shaping of higher education: The formative years in the United States, 1890 to 1940. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, *13*(1), 37-62.

Goleman, D., Boyatzis, & McKee, A. (2002). *Primal leadership*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press.

Gregory, D. (2006, July 15). Better options exist than closing Woodham High. Pensacola News Journal. Retrieved January 20, 2014, from http://www.pnj.com/

Halfon, M. S. (1989). *Integrity: A philosophical inquiry*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.

Heifetz, R.A. (1994). *Leadership without Easy Answers.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 49-50

Hersey, P., & Blanchard, K. H. (1969). Life cycle theory of leadership. *Training and Development Journal*, *23*(5), 26-34.

Hess, F. (2003). The case for being mean. Educational Leadership, 61(3), 22–27.

Higgs, M. (2003). How do we make sense of leadership in the 21st century? *Leadership and Organizational Development Journal*, *24*(5), 273-284.

Howell, W. G. (Ed.) (2005). *Besieged: School boards and the future of educational politics* (pp. 56-80). Washington, DC: Brookings Institute Press.

Howley, A., & Howley, C. (2006). Small schools and the pressure to consolidate. *Educational Policy Analysis Archives, 14*(10). Retrieved from http://epaa.asu.edu/epaa/v14n10.Html.

House, R. J. (1996). Path-goal theory of leadership: Lessons, legacy, and reformulated theory. *Leadership Quarterly*, 7(3), 323-353.

Huberman, A.M. and Miles, M.B., (1989). Some procedures for causal analysis of multiple-case data. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 2 1, pp. 55–68.

Hughes, B. (2003). Surviving closing and consolidations: The secret may be an open attitude and a healthy dose of public input. *School Administrator, 60*(7), 16-18.

Hunt, J. G. (1999). Transformational/charismatic leadership's transformation of the field: An historical essay. *Leadership Quarterly*, *10*(2), 129-144.

Hunt, J. G., & Dodge, G. E. (2001). Leadership déjà vu all over again. *Leadership Quarterly*, *11*(4), 435-458.

Jackson, K. T. (1985). *Crabgrass frontier: The suburbanization of the United States*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Janesick, V. J. (2004). *"Stretching" exercises for qualitative researchers.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Jensen, L. (2006). New immigrant settlements in rural America: Problems, prospects, and policies. *Reports on Rural America*, *1*(3). Retrieved on September 23, 2007, from www.carseyinstitute.unh.edu/.

Kvale, S., & Brinkmann, S. (2009). *Interviews: Learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Korman, A. K. (1966). "Consideration," "initiating structure," and organizational criteria – a review. *Personnel Psychology: A Journal of Applied Research*, *19*(4), 349-361. Retrieved on March 13, 2007, from EBSCO Host Research database.

Kouzes, J. M., & Posner, B. Z. (2002). *The leadership Challenge* (3rd ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Kouzes, J. M., & Posner, B. Z. (2003). *Credibility: How leaders gain it and lost it, why people demand it.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
Kuhn, T. S. (1970). *The structure of scientific revolutions* (2nd ed.). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Larson, C., & Ovando, C. (Eds.). (2001). *The color of bureaucracy: The politics of equity in multicultural school communities.* Belmont, CA: Wadsworth. /Thompson Learning, 65-69.

League of Women Voters of the Cincinnati Area. "Suburban Sprawl." Located at www.lwvcincinnati.org/publications/Suburban_Sprawl.html.

Lefebvre, H., (1991). *The Production of Space.* Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.

Leithwood, K., Louis, K.S., Anderson, S., & Wahlstrom (2004). How Leadership Influences Student Learning. Learning from Leadership Project. Retrieved from: www.wallacefoundation.org.

Leithwood, K., Jantzi, D., & Steinbach, R. (1999). *Changing leadership for changing times*. London: Open University Press.

Leithwood, K., Day, C., Sammons, P., Harris, A., & Hopkins, D. (2006). Successful school leadership: What it is and how it influences pupil learning. London: Open University Press.

Lincoln, Y. S. & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic Inquiry.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage
　　　Publications, Inc.

Locke, E. A. (1991). *The essence of leadership*. New York, NY: Lexington Books.

Lowe, K. B., & Gardner, W. L. (2001). Ten years of the Leadership Quarterly: Contributions and
　　　challenges of the future. *Leadership Quarterly*, 11(4), 459-514.

Lucas, C. T. (2006). *American higher education, a history*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.

Malen, B. (1995). The micro-politics of education: Mapping the multiple dimensions of power
　　　relations in school politics. In J. D. Scribner & D. H. Layton (Eds.), *The study of
　　　educational politics* (pp. 147-167). Washington, DC: Falmer.

Malhoit, G., & Black, D. (2003). The power of small schools: Achieving equal educational
　　　opportunity through academic success and democratic citizenship. *Nebraska Law Review,*
　　　82(1), 50-98.

Marschall, M. (2005). Minority incorporation and local school boards. In W. Howell (Ed.).
　　　Besieged: School boards and the future of educational politics (pp.173-197).
　　　Washington, DC: Brookings Institute Press.

Martin, M. M. (1998). Trust leadership. *The Journal of Leadership Studies*, *5*(3), 41-49.

Matthews, G., Zeidner, M., & Roberts, R. D. (2202). *Emotional intelligence*. Cambridge, MA:
　　　MIT Press.

Mayo, J. A., & Nohria, N. (2005). *In their time – the greatest business leaders of the twentieth
　　　century.* Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press.

McCall, M. W., & Lombardo, M. M. (1983). *Off the track: Why and how successful executives
　　　get derailed* (Technical Report No. 21). Greensboro, NC: Center for Creative
　　　Leadership.

McCall, M. W., Jr., & Lombardo, M. M. (Eds.) (1978). *Leadership: Where else can we go?*
　　　Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

McClean, R. (2003). Seven red herrings: The opposition to closure of aging urban schools. *The
　　　Clearing House, 76*(3), 140-142.

McCraw, T. K. (2000). *American business, 1920-2000: How it worked*. Wheeling, IL: Harlan
　　　Davidson.

McDermott, K. A. (1999).*Controlling Public Education: Localism versus Equity.* Lawrence, KS:
　　　University Press of Kansas,

Meranto, P., (1970). *School Politics in the Metropolis* (Columbus, OH: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Company, 149-150.

Merriam, S. B. (2009). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Mezzacappa, D., Holland, H., Willen, L., Colvin, R. L., & Feemster, R. (2008). Improving leadership for learning: Stories from the field. Seattle, WA: Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy.

Miles, M. and Huberman, M. (1994). Qualitative data analysis. An expanded sourcebook. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Miller-Kahn, L., & Smith, M. L. (2001). School choice policies in the political spectacle. *Educational Policy Analysis Archives, 9* (50).

Mirel, J. (1998). "After the fall: Continuity and change in Detroit, 1981-1995," History of Education Quarterly 38, no. 3: pgs. 237-267).

Morris, K. M., Robinson, M., & Kroll, R. (1990). *American dreams: One hundred years of business ideas and innovation from the Wall Street Journal*. New York, NY: Light bulb.

Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Nitta, K., Holley, M., & Wrobel, S. (2010). A phenomenological study of rural school consolidation. Journal of Research in Rural Education, 25(2), 1-19. Retrieved from http://jrre.psu.edu/articles/25-2.pdf

Northouse, P. G. (1997). *Leadership theory and practice* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

National Center for Educational Statistics (2011). *Digest of educational statistics 2010*. Retrieved June 8, 2012, from http://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=77.

National Rural Education Association (NREA) Task Force: Joe Bard, Clark Gardener and Regi Wieland. *Rural School Consolidation Report.* National Rural Education Association, 2005. Located at http://www.nrea.net/awards%20&%20other/Consolidation_cover_sheet1.doc.

Norton, M. Scott, L. Dean Webb, Larry L. Dlugosh, and Ward Sybouts. (1996). *The School Superintendencey: New Responsibilities, New Leadership.* Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon

Orfield, G., & Lee, C. (2005). *New faces, old patterns? Segregation in the multiracial South.* Cambridge, MA: The Civil Rights Project at Harvard University

Orfield, M., (1997). Metro politics: A Regional Agenda for Community and Stability. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press: 54.

Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (3rd ed.) Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Petrovich, J., & Wells, A. S. (Eds.) (2005). *Bringing equity back: research for a new era in American educational policy.* New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Portz, J., Stein, L., & Jones, R.(1999). *City Schools and City Politics: Institutions and Leadership in Pittsburgh, Boston, and St. Louis* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 33.

Rawls, J. (1999). A theory of justice, revised edition. Cambridge: Harvard University Press

Reeves, T. C. (2000). *Twentieth-century America: A brief history*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Reichers, A. E., & Schneider, B. (1990). Climate and culture: An evolution of constructs. In B. Schneider (Ed.), *Organizational climate and culture* (pp. 5-39). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Reynolds, D. R. (1999).*There goes the Neighborhood: Rural School Consolidation at the Grass Roots in Early Twentieth-Century Iowa.* Iowa City, IA: University of Iowa Press,

Riggio, R. E. & Conger, J. A. (2007). Getting it right: The practice of leadership. In J. A. Conger & R. E Riggio (Eds.), *The practice of leadership: Developing the next generation of leaders.* (pp. 331-344) San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Inc.

Rosenfled, Stuart A. and Jonathan P. Sher. "The Urbanization or Rural Schools, 1840-1970." In Sher, Johathan P., ed. *Education in Rural America: A Reassessment of Conventional Wisdom.* Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1977.

Rost, J. C. (1991). *Leadership for the twenty-first century*. New York, NY: Praeger.

Rubin, H. J. & Rubin, I. S. (2005). *Qualitative interviewing: The art of hearing data.* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Rumberger, R. W., & Larson, K. A. (1998). Student mobility and the increased risk of high school dropout. *American Journal of Education, 107*(1), 1-35.

Rury, J. L. (2005). *Education and social change* (2nd ed.). NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

John L. Rury, (1999) "Race, Space, and the Politics of Chicago's Public Schools: Benjamin Willis and the Tragedy of Urban Education," History of Education Quarterly 39, no. 2: 118.

Russell, R. F., & Stone, A. G. (2002). A review of servant leadership attributes: Developing a practical model. *Leadership & Organizational Development Journal*, *23*(3), 145-157.

Salka, J., with Barrett, N. (2004). *First in, last out: Leadership lessons from the New York Fire Department.* New York, NY: Penguin Group.

Salovey, P., & Mayer, J. D. (1990). Emotional intelligence. *Imagination, Cognition, & Personality, 9*(3), 185-211.

Sashkin, M., & Sashkin, M. (2003). *Leadership that matters*. CA: Berrett-Koehler.

Schulman, B. J., & Zelizer, J. E. (2008). The incomplete revolution. *Chronicle Review*, March 21, 137-139.

Scribner, J. P., Hager, D. R., & Warne, T. R. (2002). The paradox of professional community: Tales from two high schools. Educational Administration Quarterly, 38(1), 45-76.

Self, T. (2001). "Evaluation of a single school district consolidation in Ohio," American Secondary Education 30(1), 71-81

Seo, M., & Hill, N. S., (2005). Understanding the human side of merger and acquisition: An integrative framework. *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science,* 41(4), 422-443.

Sergiovanni, T. (2005). The virtues of leadership. *The Educational Forum. 69(2),* 112-123.

Sergiovanni, T. (1991). *The principal ship: A reflective practice perspective.* New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Sher, Johathan P., ed. *Education in Rural America: A Reassessment of Conventional Wisdom.* Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1977.

Sizer, T. (2005). "The Utopian high school in a democratic nation," Independent School 64(4), 62-63.

Smith, C. A. (2005). School factors that contribute to the underachievement of students of color and what culturally competent school leaders can do. *Educational Leadership and Administration, 17,* 21-32.

Smith, B. N., Montagno, R. V., & Kuzmenko, T. N. (2004). Transformational and servant Leadership: Content and contextual comparisons. *Journal of Leadership and Organizational Studies*, *10*(4), 80-91.

Spring, J. (1990). *The American school, 1642-1990* (2nd ed.). White Plains, NY: Longman.

Statistical Abstract of the U.S.: 1992. (1993). U. S. Census Bureau. Access: http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/

Strange, M. (2002). Small schools: A political irony. *Basic Education, 46*(5), 3-6.

Stewart, M. (2007, April 29). Schools' big move. Pensacola News Journal. Retrieved January 20, 2014, from http://www.pnj.com/

Stewart, M. (2007, May 26). Pack up, move out. Pensacola News Journal. Retrieved January 20, 2014, from http://www.pnj.com/

Steward, W. C. (1999). "Lincoln, Nebraska, Public School Systems: The Advance Scouts for Urban Sprawl," In Richard K. Olson and Thomas A. Lyson, Under the Blade: The Conversion of Agricultural Landscapes (Boulder, CO: Westview Press,): 370.

Stone, A. G., Russell, R. F., & Patterson, K. (2004). Transformational versus servant leadership: A difference in leader focus. *Leadership & Organizational Development Journal*, *25*(4), 349-61. Retrieved on December 22, 2005, from Emerald Full Text database at www.emeraldinsight.com/.

Stone, C. Henig, J., Jones, B., & Pierannunzi C. (2001). *Building Civic Capacity: The Politics of Reforming Urban Schools* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas,): 19-24.

Stone, C. N., Henig J. R., Jones, B. D. & Pierannunzi, C. (2001) *Building Civic Capacity: The Politics of Reforming Urban Schools* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas: 19-24.

Sunderman, G. L., & Payne, A. (2009). Does closing schools cause educational harm? A review of the research. Mid-Atlantic Equity Center.

Terrell, R. D., & Lindsey, R. B. (2009). *Culturally proficient leadership: The personal journey begins within.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Tetenbaum, T. J. (1999). Beating the odds of merger and acquisition failure: Seven key practices that improves the chance for expected integration and synergies. *Organizational Dynamics*, 28(2), 22-36.

Theoharis, G. (2007). Social justice educational leaders and resistance: Toward a theory of social justice leadership. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 43(2), 228-251.

Tyack D. & Hansot E., (1982) *Managers of Virtue: Public School Leadership in America, 1820-1980* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers,: 224-240.

Tyack, D.B. (1974). *The One Best System: A History of American Urban Education.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press,

Tyack, D. B., Lowe, R., & Hansot, E. (1984). *Public schools in hard times: The great depression and recent years*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Tyack, D.; &Theobald, P., (1988). "Democracy and the Origins of Rural Midwest Education: A Retrospective Essay," *Educational Theory* 38, no. 3: 363-367.

U.S. Bureau of Census. (1960). *Historical statistics of the United States, colonial times to1957*. Washington DC: Government Printing Office.

van Knippenberg, D., van Knippenberg, B., de Cremer, D., & Hogg, M. (2004). Leadership, self, and identity: A review and research agenda. The Leadership Quarterly, 15, 825-856

Van Maanen, J. (1983). *Qualitative methodology*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Wolcott, H. F. (1984). The man in the principal's office: An ethnography. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winson

Wilson, L. (Fall 2007). *The Power of Culture and Passion condensed from* educational Horizons, 86, 35-44.

Wren, J. T. (Ed.). (1995). *The leader's companion: Insight on leadership throughout the ages*. NY, New York: Free Press.

Yin, R. K. (1994). *Case study research: design and methods*. (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA. Sage Publications.

Yosso, T. J. (2005). Whose culture has capital? A critical race theory discussion of community cultural wealth. *Race, Ethnicity and Education, 8*(1), 69-91.

Young, E.,& Green, H. (2005). School system consolidation. Tennessee Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations. Retrieved September 16, 2009 from www.tv.gov/tacir

Yukl, G. (1971). Toward a behavioral theory of leadership. *Organizational Behavior and Human Performance*, 6, 414-440.

Yukl, G. (2006). *Leadership in organizations* (6th ed.). NJ: Prentice Hall.

Zinn, H. (2003). *The twentieth century*. New York, New York: HarperCollins.

Appendix A:

Demographic/Biographical Survey

Prior to the start of the first interview a brief Demographic/Biographical Survey will be

requested of each participant.

Date: _____

Demographic Information

Name: _____

Job Title: _____

Years of Administrative Experience: _____

Highest Degree Attained: _____ Master's _____ Specialist _____ Doctorate

_____ Other (Please Specify) _____

Age: _____ 25-35 _____ 36-45 _____ 46-55 _____ 56-65 _____ 66 and over

Gender: _____ M _____ F

Ethnicity: _____ White _____ Hispanic or Latino _____ American Indian or Alaska

Native _____ Asian _____ Black or African American _____ Other

School of Employment: _____

School District/State: _____

Appendix B:

IRB Approval Form

USF
UNIVERSITY OF
SOUTH FLORIDA

RESEARCH INTEGRITY AND COMPLIANCE
Institutional Review Boards, FWA No. 00001669
12901 Bruce B. Downs Blvd., MDC035 ● Tampa, FL 33612-4799
(813) 974-5638 ● FAX (813) 974-7091

March 1, 2013

Claudius Effiom
Educational Leadership
4760 Neptune Drive SE
St. Petersburg, FL 33705

RE: **Expedited Approval for Initial Review**
IRB#:   Pro00011984
Title: Principal Leadership: New Roles and Expectations in School Consolidation

Study Approval Period: 3/1/2013 to 3/1/2014

Dear Mr. Effiom:

On 3/1/2013, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed and **APPROVED** the above application and all documents outlined below.

Approved Item(s):
Protocol Document(s):
EFFIOM PROPOSAL 2-19-13.docx

Consent/Assent Document(s)*:
EFFIOM IC minimal risk.docx.pdf

*Please use only the official IRB stamped informed consent/assent document(s) found under the "Attachments" tab. Please note, these consent/assent document(s) are only valid during the approval period indicated at the top of the form(s).

It was the determination of the IRB that your study qualified for expedited review which includes activities that (1) present no more than minimal risk to human subjects, and (2) involve only procedures listed in one or more of the categories outlined below. The IRB may review research through the expedited review procedure authorized by 45CFR46.110 and 21 CFR 56.110. The research proposed in this study is categorized under the following expedited review categories:

(6) Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes.

(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

As the principal investigator of this study, it is your responsibility to conduct this study in accordance with IRB policies and procedures and as approved by the IRB. Any changes to the approved research must be submitted to the IRB for review and approval by an amendment.

We appreciate your dedication to the ethical conduct of human subject research at the University of South Florida and your continued commitment to human research protections. If you have any questions regarding this matter, please call 813-974-5638.

Sincerely,

John Schinka, Ph.D., Chairperson
USF Institutional Review Board

Appendix C:

Explanatory Letter to Conversational Partners

RE: Research on urban school consolidations

Dear Participant,

      The following brief information is provided for you to decide whether you wish to participate in the above referenced study because you have experienced this phenomenon firsthand in the last several years. I am a doctoral candidate in the Department of Policy Studies at the University of South Florida; Tampa, Florida. The chair of my doctoral committee is Dr. William Black.

      The purpose of this dissertation study is to analyze events during a school consolidation as perceived by the school based leader. I seek to describe which events were important and revealing during the course of the school consolidation. The themes I will focus on relate to the actions, behaviors and decisions of the school principal acting as the leader of the school being consolidated and closed.

      The procedure will be a multi-case study analysis of four urban school consolidations. My personal experience in the 2008/2009 school year as the principal of Kennedy Middle School, a traditional public school in Clearwater, Florida which was consolidated with Coachman Fundamental middle school, a public school of choice also located in Clearwater will represent one of the four schools in this study.

      I will seek to collect data from you in one two hour interview and a one hour follow up interview conducted at times, locations and methods that are convenient for you. The interviews will, with your permission, be recorded by a digital voice recorder and transcribed. To maintain confidentiality, you will not be identified by name on the tape. The study will be submitted to the appropriate Institutional Review Boards and all requisite university protocols to ensure the safety and privacy of all participants will be used. You should be aware that you would be free to withdraw at any time you choose.

      The expected benefits associated with your participation include your contribution in providing future administrators with an insider's perspective as to the tensions, conflicts, successes and challenges inherent in a school consolidation. In the current fiscal climate we continue to see an increased use of consolidations and school closings as tools used by school districts to close budget deficits.

Appendix C (continued)

Your cooperation in participating in this study would be most appreciated.

I may be reached by email at effiomc@pcsb.org

Thank you,

Claudius B. Effiom

Appendix D:

The Informed Consent Agreement

This study involves interviewing at least three school principals concerning their experience with the phenomenon of school consolidation and is therefore a research study.

1. The purpose of the study is to describe and explain the experiences of three school principals as they navigated through the phenomenon of a school consolidation.

2. The study is expected to last from March 2013 through June 2013.

3. The number of people to be interviewed is four

4. The procedure of the research involves asking participants during the course of two interviews to describe their lived experience as school principals whose public schools were closed as part of a consolidation or merger with another public school within one school district. The principals will be asked questions related to their roles and responsibilities, conflicts and challenges during the approximately one year period of their schools consolidation journey.

5. The interviews will consist of one two hour interview and a second one hour interview. Each participant will be interviewed twice. The audio files will be protected in my home and will be kept for three years.

6. There are no foreseeable risks to the participants and they may leave the study at any time.

Appendix D (continued)

7. Possible benefits are educational, that is to contribute to the body of knowledge about school principals' experiences and perspectives as they navigate leading their schools through a consolidation phenomenon that resulted in the closing of their school.

8. Members may choose to be completely anonymous and all names will be changed for reasons of confidentiality. Only I, and the chair of my dissertation committee, will know this information.

9. For questions about the research, contact me, Claudius B. Effiom at 727-551-9227

10. Participation in this study is totally voluntary. Refusal to participate will not result in penalty or loss of benefits.

11. There is no cost to you to participate in the study.

12. The University of South Florida Institutional Review Board, IRB, may be contacted at 813-974-5638. The IRB may request to see my research records of the study.

I, _____, agree to participate in this study with Claudius B. Effiom. I realize that this information will be used for educational purposes. I understand I may withdraw from this study at any time. I understand the intent of the study.

Signed _____

Date _____

Appendix E:

Interviewee Member Check Form

March XXX, 2013

Dear _____

Thank you for taking the time to share your insights related to your consolidation experience

with me on XXXXX. Attached please find a draft copy of the verbatim transcripts of the

interview. Please review the transcription for accuracy of responses and reporting of information.

Please feel free to contact me by phone at 727-551-9227 or via email at effiomc@pcsb.org

should you have any questions.

Thank you again for your willingness to participate in this study.

Sincerely,

Claudius B. Effiom.

Appendix F:

List of Interview Questions

Consolidation Questions

- Tell me about school consolidation. What happened? Why did it happen? How long did the consolidation process take?
- Do you know whose interests it was to seek this consolidation? If you know, please share your opinion with me.
- Are you aware of any stakeholders who may have benefited from this consolidation? Similarly are you aware of any stakeholders who did not benefit or were harmed by changes in the existing relationships in each of the consolidating schools?
- Are there any ongoing implications of the school consolidation experience that you are aware of at this time?

Institutional Roles and Responsibilities
- Describe what happened immediately before the consolidation, during the consolidation and after the consolidation?
- Describe what you did as the leader of the school immediately before the consolidation? Why? Did that change over the time frame of the school consolidation? If so, what changed?
- What responsibilities did you attend to in the course of implementing the school consolidation process?
- How did you come to know how to navigate the various responsibilities of a leader in the consolidation of two schools?
- Are you aware of or were you told about some aspect(s) of the school consolidation process that you did you not attend to? If this is the case, would you mind sharing this with me and the context in which these issues may have occurred?
- If there are issues that you may not have been aware of at the time of the consolidation, why do you believe these issues did not get your attention at the time they occurred?

Politics of Consolidation: Navigating Tensions, Using Influence, and Staying Sane
- How did you navigate the various relationships and policies of school consolidation involving the various stakeholders? Especially, the parent communities in each of the two schools involved in the consolidation? The teachers at your school site; teachers at the other consolidating school, and the other school principal involved in the consolidation?
- What were the most prominent conflicts and tensions during the school consolidation process?

Appendix F (continued)

- Were there differing implications of the school consolidation experience for different stakeholders impacted by the consolidation? If so, please describe these implications as it relates to the three main stakeholder groups impacted by your consolidation experience.
- Is there anything you know now about school consolidations that you did not know when you experienced the consolidation?